BRIAN COX ON BREXIT, LABOUR, SWEARING AND *SUCCESSION*

THE NEW EUROPEAN

#182 ★ www.theneweuropean.co.uk

Thursday, February 13 - Wednesday, February 19, 2020 ★ £3

WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD DOM?

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BY JAMES BALL & LIZ GERARD

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Ireland beyond the watershed

Andrew Adonis

Ireland has just had a watershed election and the Irish are standing back in amazement and saying "what next"? Is a united Ireland on the cards in the near future?

Maybe, appears to be the answer. It depends on two Sinn Féin women politicians that most of us had never heard of until they took over their pan-Ireland party two years ago: Mary Lou McDonald, in Dublin, and Michelle O'Neill, in Belfast.

O'Neill became deputy first minister in Northern Ireland last month, in the restoration of power-sharing after a two and a half year suspension at the behest of the Democratic Unionist Party. McDonald is now powerbroker in Dublin and could end up with a top government job – conceivably Taoiseach – or if not leader of the opposition in pole position to win next time.

So Sinn Féin could soon be at the heart of Irish government north and south. It is hard to see how that does not lead, sooner or later, to a referendum on a united Ireland.

Sinn Féin is no longer regarded by most voters, particularly the young, as a front for terrorism and bitter sectarianism. It is on the way to becoming a conventional reformist party of the left. Given the esoteric ideological differences between the two traditional Irish parties of government, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, formed from the two sides of the Irish civil war of a century ago, this is a big calling card.

The changing of the guard, with McDonald and O'Neill replacing Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, turned out to be the creation of a largely new party in public perception, 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement put widespread terrorism firmly into the past.

McDonald was educated at a private school and Trinity College Dublin, the most respectable public institution in Ireland. It's like a Labour Party leader in Britain going to a top school, always (think Tony Blair and Clement Attlee) a good starting point for winning over moderate voters on both sides.

Like most outside observers, I assumed that Leo Varadkar's impressive performance in the Brexit negotiations, and his genial modernising persona, would win him another term.

But it turns out that once Brexit was sorted by Varadkar on terms highly advantageous to Ireland, the voters wanted answers to the big problems of public services and housing in Ireland, and these issues dominated the campaign. Ironically, Sinn Féin benefited from the same populist forces which drove Brexit in left-behind communities in England and Wales, which have still not recovered from the 2008 slump.

Ireland fared even worse than England in the slump. Its health services, in particular, are deplorably bad by European comparison. The Irish want a new deal and a groundswell of voters want it now.

It would be impossible to have a Dail more 'hung'. The three largest parties have respectively 38 seats (Fianna Fail), 37 (Sinn Féin) and 35 (Fine Gael) out of the total of 160, with the Greens fourth on 12. The possible combinations are various and so too is the possible head of government.

If Sinn Féin gets into government, its best course would be to ignore the unification issue for the time being and concentrate on becoming a serious party of public service improvement. This is equally true in the north, where the nationalist communities, particularly in Derry, still have terrible public services and don't look back at Sinn Féin's record in the last period of devolution with particular affection.

I have seen this at first hand in Derry, the second city of Northern Ireland which, incredibly, still does not have its own university. This is an emotive, and socially and economically very significant, cause for the city.

It dates back to the sectarian Stormont government before power-sharing, which refused to locate Northern Ireland's second university in Derry. They instead put it in Coleraine, a Unionist-dominated town 30 miles away.

However, more relevant to today is that for three crucial years Martin McGuinness was education minister of Northern Ireland – and he didn't deliver a university for Derry.

All politics is local. This is no less true of nationalist politics. Sinn Féin should concentrate on all those schools, hospitals, universities and housing projects. And let nationalism look after itself.

POWERBROKER: Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald celebrates her election success
Photo: Getty Images

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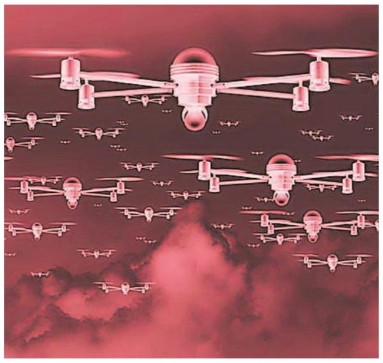

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The city that was effectively silenced for decades, before finding its voice again

BY SOPHIA DEBOICK

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THE NEW EUROPEAN
"A POP-UP PUBLICATION"

Published in Norwich and printed by Newsprinters (Broxbourne) Ltd, Great Cambridge Road, Waltham Cross, EN8 8DY and Carn Web, Morton 3 Esky Drive, Carn Industrial Estate, Portadown, Northern Ireland.
Registered Office: Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1RE
ISSN 2398-8762

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AGENDA

ABRASIVE CHARACTER: Dominic Cummings is reportedly now at loggerheads with members of the cabinet as well as the media
Photo: Getty Images

Heading for defeat..?

The political street fighter picking fights with the world

JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED

A small mind knows to stop digging if you're stuck in a hole. A small mind knows not to open up another front if you're already under attack from multiple sides. A small mind knows political advisors shouldn't be seen and also shouldn't be heard, at least by the public.

But, of course, no-one can accuse Dominic Cummings of being a small mind.

A lesser man would have hesitated before taking on the entirety of the UK's political lobby – the club of journalists given privileged access to the heart of Westminster, in exchange for compliance with a mutually-agreed set of rules – in a war of attrition.

But Cummings is the man who at the helm of the Vote Leave campaign took on most of the UK's political and legal establishment and won. So why not start a series of individually petty fights with the journalists tasked with covering every move of the UK's politics for the four-and-a-half year term of this government?

Cummings, unlike less daring advisors, has seen that the public care little about who gets invited to which briefing, where those briefings are held, and how quickly you can text about them, and so started the fight his predecessors wouldn't – and so far seems to be getting his way, though it is early days yet.

Another Number 10 advisor in the midst of a war with the lobby might confine himself – at least temporarily – to that high-stakes confrontation. We cannot say that of Cummings, whose policy positions are known to be in opposition to several leading cabinet ministers, and numerous media reports detail his bids to get the chancellor of the exchequer Sajid Javid removed from post at the next reshuffle, reportedly without success.

A rift between Number 10 staff and the occupant of the Treasury would hardly be a new thing in British politics – as other *New European* columnists could attest first hand – but for such briefings to reach such intensity barely a month after a thumping election win is quite something.

Even this battle, if you believe the Sunday papers, has not been enough to satiate Cummings' apparently endless need for feuds: having taken on the media that covers Number 10, and the cabinet that serves with Number 10, he is apparently also determined to take on an occupant of Number 10 (or to be pedantic, the larger and nicer flat above Number 11) – the prime minister's partner, Carrie Symonds.

CONFLICT: Boris Johnson's partner Carrie Symonds and Dilyn, the couple's Jack Russell-cross
Photo: Getty Images

Symonds, a well-liked former Conservative Party strategist, is credited with several of Boris Johnson's policy announcements, especially on green issues and protecting the countryside. Her allegiances and policy agenda has apparently brought her into conflict with Johnson's chief advisor.

It is a bold man indeed who takes on his boss's colleagues, his friends in the media, and his girlfriend all at once. To complete the package, Cummings need only start a feud with Dilyn, the prime minister's dog, and the Queen, his nominal boss.

Taking on the media and cabinet at once creates a potentially endless feedback loop against you, as each story feeds the next feud, with few willing to give the benefit of the doubt and many keen to stick an extra boot in.

Against that backdrop, facing a public defeat on a policy conflict – the continuation of HS2,

which Cummings bitterly opposed – most men wouldn't comment. Instead, asked about whether HS2's green light meant he was losing influence, he told a visibly baffled TV reporter that "night time is the right time to fight crime" – lines from the theme tune for children's cartoon, *PJ Masks*.

Whether he was leaking a radical new policing strategic or merely being gnomic, it is clear Cummings is playing 5D chess while his rivals are still stuck with snakes and ladders.

Perhaps Cummings really can see something the rest of us miss and his simultaneous war on, well, everyone is part of a master plan. But to us mere mortal observers, it actually seems something of a shame, because – whisper it – Cummings might actually have quite a lot to offer the political system.

Leaving Brexit aside (just this once), Cummings is at least an original thinker and he's far from being a traditional conservative, whether with a small or a capital 'C'. He is not wrong to notice that the lobby system needs reform. He's not wrong to notice the same about the civil service.

He is capable of spotting good ideas and trying to convince politicians to do them – a UK version of the USA's Arpa (Advanced Projects Research Agency) could be a genuine boon to the country, supported by forward-thinking economists on the left and right alike.

Those who have worked with him, even those who aren't always fans of him overall, say he listens to experts and follows evidence. In a political system known for bullying, he is known for being a relatively calm and decent colleague, if not always a reasonable one.

Cummings' broad style – if not his office manner – seems to require head-on conflict. It's not enough to win and get his way, secure the reform, or whatever other goal, but the other side needs to know they've been beaten.

That has clearly served him well in his campaigns: it was one of the driving forces that helped Vote Leave secure Brexit against a sluggish and consensus-driven Remain campaign. But like thousands of (lesser?) men before him, Cummings is swiftly learning the differences between managing a campaign of a couple of dozen paid staff to the machinery of state, which employs millions.

Few would try to claim that the machinery of the British state is well-oiled. Between austerity, a mono-culture dominated by PPEists (philosophy, politics and economics graduates), and a clubbable political media who largely print what they are told without too much independent scrutiny, the engine is breaking down.

But it can still crush irritants in its wheels. Cummings has become a household name by ignoring conventional wisdom, by picking fights that others wouldn't, by making no effort to hide his contempt for idiots, whether they're on 'his side' or his adversaries.

It would be something of an irony, then, if his final political triumph, the last thing he accomplishes that others failed to do, is to manage what Remain, People's Vote, and then the Labour Party did not: to bring down the great Dominic Cummings.

There would be some consolation. It would, at least, be a joy and a triumph that for once he could share with the British establishment.

FIGHTING TALK

Dominic Cummings on the cabinet – "*PJ Masks* will do a greater job than all of them put together"

... on David Davis – "thick as mince, lazy as a toad and vain as Narcissus"

... on Tory Brexiteers – "During the referendum so many of you guys were too busy shooting or skiing or chasing girls to do any actual work"

... to Labour MP Karl Turner – "I don't know who you are"

... to Jeremy Corbyn, before the election was called – "Come on Jeremy, let's do this election, don't be scared"

War on the media is far from over

LIZ GERARD on the latest skirmishes in the ongoing battle with the press inspired by Dominic Cummings

Journalists don't like to "be the story". Unless they can claim to have saved a lost dog/sick child/the planet, they tend to go a bit coy under the spotlight. "People aren't interested in us," they say.

Well, this week has shown that people are interested. They are still complaining to the BBC, for instance, for the "inadequate" reporting of the political editors' walkout in Downing Street last week.

It makes a sort of sense: more than half the country didn't vote for Boris Johnson and a good proportion of that half feels that he hasn't been held to account by the media, particularly the BBC. So the limited reporting of that Brexit briefing boycott is seen as another example of the prime minister's team being let off the hook.

There have been too many of those. The Kuenssbergs, Pestons and Newton Dunns were absolutely right not to accept communications director Lee Cain's clumsy rug apartheid by which he sought to separate the friendly sheep from the possibly more obstinate goats. But, boy, they've taken their time to show a bit of backbone.

Those on the 'right' side of the rug have been far too cosy to Boris Johnson and his chief of staff Dominic Cummings; tweeting, broadcasting and printing "Boris says" stories – essentially propaganda shared in private briefings – without the most basic checks. Remember the Matt Hancock aide who was "assaulted" by "Labour activists" on a hospital visit during the election campaign? Except he wasn't. More recently the *Sunday Telegraph* told us that Boris was "privately furious" because the EU was reneging on its Brexit trade deal offer. Except it wasn't.

Johnson has been refusing to answer to anyone but the softest audience ever since he put himself up for the Tory leadership. He holds 'press conferences' for children, but shirks real press conferences with real journalists.

He holds 'people's question times' on Facebook, where he is quizzed on such vital issues as what shampoo he uses. But he swerves real prime minister's questions in the Commons, with only three appearances in 20 weeks as he forced through the biggest constitutional change in a generation.

He sits on Holly and Phil's sofa, but not Andrew Neil's black chair.

And all the time he is flooding social media timelines with videos where he can speak without interruption or challenge.

During the election campaign Pippa Crerar of the *Mirror* – one of those on the wrong side of the rug last week – was refused a place on the Tory battlebus. Did other journalists covering Johnson's journey disembark in solidarity? Nope.

One of the reasons given for denying her access to the Brexit briefing last week was that she wasn't invited; those not on the approved list had "barged in".

Now there's a thing.

One of the occasions that Johnson chose not to be put on the spot was Channel 4's pre-election climate change debate. There was some barging in that day, too. Michael Gove turned up, uninvited – with the prime minister's father in tow – and said he wanted to appear on the programme. He was told he couldn't; the event was for party leaders only. How did Johnson's party respond? By complaining to Ofcom and threatening Channel 4's licence. Yet the press corps' complaint was written off as snowflakery.

The way Johnson's team is making mainstream media enemies – and seems set to wage all-out war on the BBC – is scarily out of the Trump playbook. Downing Street journalists had to take a stand. But it was these very people who allowed this situation to develop.

They all want to be in Dom's contacts book. If he whispers in their ear, they are happy to take dictation. If he calls two or three of them, they don't ask "why aren't you telling everyone this?" They take the 'scoop' with thanks.

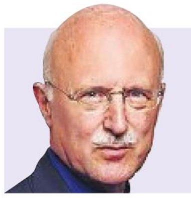
There's nothing particularly new about it. It happened under Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair. If only the favoured few had turned up on Monday, would our heroes and heroines have said: "Why isn't there anyone here from the *i* or *Mirror*?" The protesters argue that the significance here is that it involved a supposedly politically neutral civil servant. Maybe, but there are plenty of those with limited audiences. It just all gets a bit uncomfortable when you actually see a fellow journalist being sent on their way, when you see enacted before your very eyes how you are all being controlled.

Of course journalists need to cultivate friends in high places. But for rather too long, our media have given the impression of being used. The fear of being frozen out has been getting in the way of objective reporting.

Their belated protest brought home to a wider public the way the lobby system can be manipulated to control what information reaches the people. There was supposed to be a public inquiry into the relationship between politicians and the press: Leveson 2. Neither the Tories nor the papers wanted it – the existing snuggle suits them both too well – and it was duly squashed.

So while the walkout was a welcome reminder to Johnson and Cummings that they shouldn't – and won't – get it all their own way, don't expect the "Boris says" splashes to dry up any time soon.

Swimming with sharks



MICHAEL WHITE ON THE POLITICS OF DANGEROUSLY ALLURING WATERS OF POPULISM

Sitting down to write this article I left BBC Radio 4 on in the background. Always a mistake, it's often worse than Google or Twitter in taking over good intentions. *Start the Week* was marking this week's 75th anniversary of the RAF's brutal fire-bombing of the beautiful German city of Dresden – 'Florence on the Elbe' – in the closing stages of the Second World War. No, I don't propose to write about the past, but about leadership. Alas, Europe's past is always about its present and future too, leaders included. Just look at the Irish election result.

Big picture first. The predictable fall of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK), Angela Merkel's chosen successor as German chancellor, means that the leadership of the EU is again thrown into question at a critical time. It comes when the new Commission's budget crisis, its ambitious climate change agenda, its unresolved immigration policy – the 27's future relationship with the 'third country' UK too, of course – cry out for direction from Berlin, long the sheet anchor of the system. Emmanuel Macron is ambitious to lead, but Paris lacks the heft and Macron is under siege at home.

Authoritarian China, the emerging global power, is turned inwards grappling with the coronavirus epidemic which looks set to ravage the wider world's health and economy. Russian leadership is negative and disruptive. Most painful of all, the United States is also now in the clutches of a dangerous disruptor, emboldened by his 'acquittal' by a rigged senatorial jury, the political opposition weakened by its own ineptitude, not just in Iowa. Under the unruly, incoherent populism of Boris Johnson, Britain does not feel so very different. Dresden's history should remind us of the fragility of our civilisation.

* * *

Even under the communist GDR regime the Saxony capital maintained its long tradition as a high tech as well as cultural centre – from porcelain to cameras – and much money has been spent restoring both since unification in 1990. But cash and a proud culture are no defence. Just as it was an enthusiastic centre of Nazi savagery – from book-burning to the persecution of Jews and artists – so Dresden has since become a nest of neo-Nazi sentiment. Birthplace of the anti-immigrant Pegida movement in 2014, it is also a stronghold of the AfD party. Faced with weekly anti-migrant rallies in the city – its mainstream parties on the council declared a 'Nazi emergency' in 2019.

That did not stop the surge. After this month's regional elections in neighbouring Thuringia a pro-business, centrist, Free Democrat candidate was elected to be minister-president with the votes of AfD deputies as well as some of Angela Merkel's local Christian Democratic (CDU) team. That broke a post-war convention between the main parties, the CDU and Social Democrats, now in flagging coalition in Berlin, not to deal with far-right parties. German courts have deemed the AfD to be one. Chancellor Merkel hit the roof and the deal collapsed amid resignations, culminating in AKK's. The saga isn't over and Merkel's power to dominate events – and her own succession – is fading.

Sounds familiar? It should.

* * *

Everywhere we look the once-solid foundations of the post-war order are under attack. More than a decade after the financial crash the mainstream is still not providing answers which will persuade disaffected voters that their protest votes for populists – nominally left as well as right – are a faster road to disillusionment (and worse) than they can yet grasp. When populism fails it can only ratchet up the dial and offer more populism. Things can quickly get ugly. Just look at Donald Trump's brazen, bullying behaviour since the senate gave him the all-clear.

The latest example of disruption, so conspicuously under our nose that even insular Fleet Street has noticed, is Sinn Féin (SF)'s unexpected – even by itself – success in winning the popular vote (25%) in Ireland's general election. It helps that the Irish speak English, I suppose. But not even Jason Walsh's lively report in last week's *TNE* expected it to happen in still-conservative Ireland. Whatever Fine Gael's (outgoing?) Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has been saying since Saturday's upset about not dealing with the gunmens' proxies, a three-way split in the Dail is hard to ignore. Everyone knows that something emerging from its tortuous single transferable voting (STV) system is going to have to give. Fianna Fail leader, Micheál Martin, who condemned SF's "omerta" towards the IRA only last week, may soon be the man to give it.

It is egotistical of Brits to see Brexit as the driver of this political – possibly constitutional – upheaval, though Brexit played a part. Preoccupied with the issue and EU27 solidarity since taking office in 2017, the relatively inexperienced Varadkar took his eye off domestic issues. Among young voters – Ireland is a demographically young country – and the "left behinds" – often the same people – high rents and housing shortages (just a decade after a crazy housing boom bust Irish banks) was voters' number one concern. Not far behind was a flagging health care.

Bustling Dublin and the middle class have recovered from the bankers' crash. Purporting to be a party of the left and belatedly pro-EU, SF tapped into resentment of inequality. It is a debate that sounds very Dresden, which has been part-colonised by West German *Wessies* to the frustration of left behind and patronised locals who feel *Ostalgie* for the all-encompassing social network of the old GDR, its youth clubs and day care more than its secret police. AfD revisionists have even tapped into a "bombing holocaust" which tries to equate the RAF with Auschwitz.

But, if twentysomething German voters have no memory of the Stasi, what do their Irish counterparts know or care about the Troubles which all-but-ended in the 1994 ceasefire, before most of them were born? Should socially progressive young Ireland wonder about allegations that former Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams protected his paedophile brother, Liam? Apparently not, historic abuse cover-ups apply only to priests and the 'elite'. Haven't the party been power-sharing at Stormont for years? Isn't SF's new president and aspiring Taoiseach, Mary Lou McDonald, a Trinity College Eng. Lit. graduate and wholesome mother of two?

* * *

All true, but breakaway IRA men tried to bomb a Brexit night ferry on January 31 and Sinn Féin continued to justify an historic IRA murder (the victim was involved in "drugs and criminality") during the recent campaign. Kevin Toolis, who wrote *Rebel Hearts*, a gripping account of the Provisional IRA, claimed this week that McDonald is just a brand-cleansing "poster girl" for the Provos shadowy Army Council which still pulls SF's strings and makes no apology for its past. It sounds a bit like the sentimentalised brutality of BBC TV's *Peaky Blinders*.

Whatever Dublin insiders in politics and the media say to dismiss the party's demand for an all-Irish border poll within five years as their price for cooperation, it is now more firmly on the agenda than a week ago. Johnson's EU withdrawal deal which leaves Northern Ireland effectively inside the single market – the border down the Irish Sea – is working to further integrate Ireland economically. In the 1921 split, Belfast was the industrial powerhouse. The high tech boot is now on Dublin's foot.

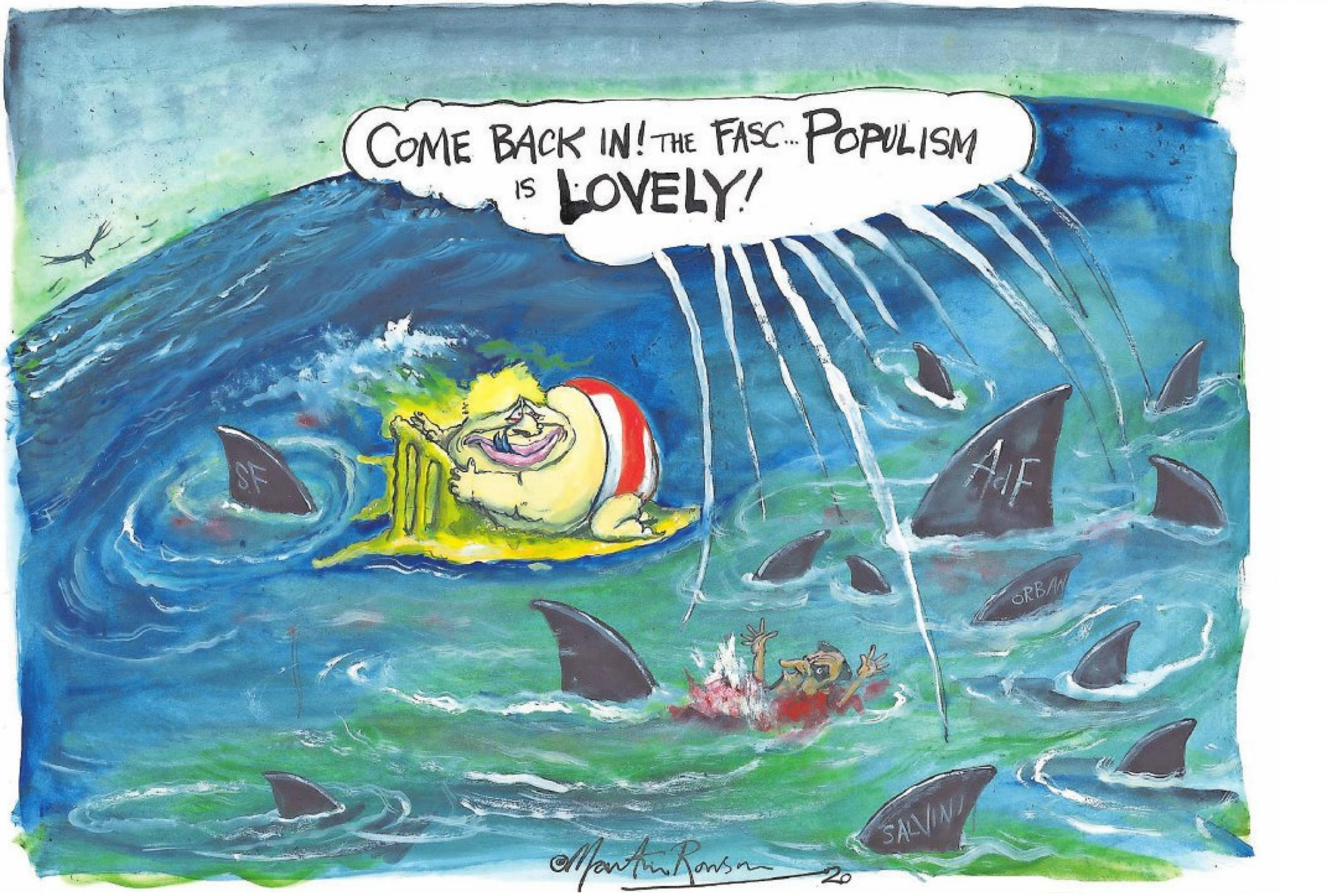
See what odds on a united Ireland you can get at Ladbroke's. The paradox of Nicola Sturgeon's renewed demands for another Scottish referendum is that – at a practical level – Brexit makes an independent Scotland economically much harder, as does the SNP's increasingly threadbare record after 13 inglorious years in power at Holyrood. For the pro-EU majority in Northern Ireland – also feeling thwarted by Brexit – the logic increasingly works the other way, even if many in the 26 county south don't want the burden of Unionist dissent.

All that is another way of saying that, at a time of acute geo-political challenge, governance over the British Isles lies in thrall to competing visions of nationalism – Irish, Scottish and English, the latter dressed up as Global Britain, but English and parochial for many. No amount of Boris pipedreams about building a £20 billion bridge across 28 miles of stormy water between Larne and Portpatrick in Scotland – the route strewn with old explosive dumps, as with Boris Airport in the Thames – can disguise the centrifugal danger. Which side would the customs posts be built, prime minister? Michael Gove has just admitted there won't be "frictionless trade" at Dover either.

Typical of the Johnson era, Tuesday's controversial announcement that HS2 – the 'Adonis Line'? – will go ahead over Johnson's instincts (did Tory donors in the construction industry clinch it?) involved a headline distraction or two: the Irish bridge and a promised £5bn over five years to improve out-of-London bus (and even bike) services. More buses? Excellent, but where's the money coming from when few now dispute that Brexit will cause a hit to the economy – "only temporary" – and thus to tax revenues? Good question, but I am told that, when Boris unveiled last week's gimmick – I mean strategic policy statement – on getting rid of "dirty" cars by 2035, officials were specifically told not to produce costings on the cash or carbon.

* * *

Even Corbyn Labour made a figleaf attempt to cost its over-reaching ambitions. But that is not how government-by-column works. Ministers have promised to solve the crisis in elderly care. Ker-ching on the till. They want to keep more serious offenders – not just unreformed teenage jihadis – in prison, but have built few of the costly extra prison places promised to house them. Ker-ching again. They want to build more houses and flats, not with Grenfell cladding, and all that infrastructure in "red wall" areas. Not to mention recruit 20,000 more police which won't be easy even if the pay is improved. Public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confidence in poor clear-up rates has dived. Ker-ching, Ker-ching.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It feels a different Treasury than the one the new Lord Spreadsheet – formerly Phil Hammond – ran, though officials there are fighting a rearguard action against the Magic Money Tree economics of Dominic Cummings and other "unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats" as we might call the Johnson kitchen cabinet if it was European. After a *Times* report that he is losing more turf wars than he wins – HS2 being only one example – the People's Dom boasted elsewhere in the paper that he's taking back control of NHS England from its formidable CEO, Simon Stevens. A bad idea and we'll believe it if it happens. Stevens is a much better politician than Dom and a pal of Dom's boss at Balliol College, Oxford. Dom has reportedly managed to fall out with First Girlfriend, Carrie Symonds. Not wise.

All of which frames Sajid Javid's March 11 budget, a fact that keeps him in his job through the reshuffle. Not even Dom the Disrupter dare push the chancellor under the bus this month as the *Sun* disposed of Holyrood's finance minister and Sturgeon's tipped successor. Derek Mackay quit on his budget day for deplorable private behaviour towards a 16-year-old adolescent – or voter, as the SNP usually calls them.

It is no surprise to *New European* readers, though clearly a shock to those at the *Mail* and *Daily Borisgraph*, that a government that wants to spend more must either cut spending elsewhere or raise taxes and borrowing. As *Sunday Times* economics pundit David Smith wittily puts it, ones that want "to increase spending and cut taxes have to borrow even more." Wriggle as they may, Jeremy Corbyn, Mary Lou McDonald, and arch credit card splurge, Donald Trump, can't escape this pretty basic fact.

Boris Johnson, who appears to know as much about economics as my cat (the one that got run over), may denounce and even sack the "gloomsters", along with half his cabinet. But he can't sack the facts. So his vassal chancellor is scrambling around for projects to cut – benefit claimants who don't vote much are always a safe target – as well as taxes to raise. Alas, his red wall election strategy means he must risk offending his heartland voters. Revive Vince Cable's mansions tax on what are mostly not mansions at all? Slash pension tax relief to a fairer model? Renege on that pledge to cut corporation tax and raise the higher rate threshold from £50k to £80k? He's already done the last two. The *Borisgraph* is furious.

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All of which should be a field day for a competent and focussed opposition. But for the third time in a decade Labour is distracted by a divisive leadership contest which – unlike 1983, 1992 or 1994 – offers no certain prospect of relief if the best candidate wins, as he looks likely to, campaign dirty tricks against him not withstanding. It's not just us. In Germany, France, Italy and beyond incumbents hang on by their finger tips and the mainstream opposition are enfeebled. The populists – from Berlin to Dublin via Mario Salvini in Rome – are making the running. In Vienna the Greens have just risked a coalition deal to govern with Sebastian Kurz's hardline OVP.

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In Washington, even more than in the Johnson Tory party, the populist wing has captured a major party. In South Africa the familiar combination of economic distress and glib populist remedies are now eating away at the once sacred memory of Nelson Mandela, the ANC liberation hero a puppet for white power, say agitators in the townships. Why is it happening? Where has moderate leadership gone, where are the alternatives that offer difficult choices, not panaceas?

Mainstream failure to address growing inequality has been part of the story since Reagan-Thatcher gave it a big shove in the 1980s. Not everyone turned out to be a winner after all. The prestige of politics suffered further from bad calls on Iraq and bank regulation. It's also easy – and right – to blame the savagery of unmediated 24/7 social media which so increases the personal cost and political difficulty of rational public dialogue without rancour and hovering violence.

But media abuse, usually from the right, has long been a constant. What's changed from my experience and perspective are two critical components. One is the relative financial sacrifice which talented people have to make – lawyers are a good example – to enter politics compared with soaring rewards they can obtain in top public sector jobs as well as in business and finance. Why be a cabinet minister for £140k – a weekly pay cheque in Premier League football – and have the tabloids at your door and in your bins?

But the democratisation of leadership procedures is, alas, a factor, I fear, especially when populism and open selection rules hold sway. Who exactly picked Johnson or Corbyn? Who exactly voted in Iowa to promote 38-year-old 'Mayor Pete' Buttigieg and 78-year-old Corbynista, senator Bernie Sanders from the Democrats lacklustre pack? Ditto New Hampshire. Is self-funded billionaire Mike Bloomberg really the best the party can do to defeat a self-styled billionaire? Do you feel that sense of hopelessness many Germans felt in the low, dishonest 1930s? On Sunday, Hollywood surprised itself by giving the Best Picture Oscar to South Korea's *Parasite*. It's a dark and bitter satire on inequality – brutally funny but with no answers.

Consensus on climate could go

The urgency of the environmental cause is not just down to damage being caused, but the creeping fatalism that could overtake it, says ZOE WILLIAMS. More optimism is needed

It's great when everyone agrees, right? We've had enough of the politics of division, the zero-sum atmosphere where nobody's happy until their opponent has been obliterated.

So why doesn't it fill me with confidence to hear everyone broadly agree on climate change?

There is a tiny amount of dissent from the village-idiot wing of the Conservative Party, but otherwise, the consensus is rock solid. Civil society, from students to the Women's Institute; the world of commerce, from businesses to the Bank of England; politicians, from the right to the whole of the left; from *The Sun* to *The Guardian*, everybody's on the same page. Climate change isn't just real – it presents a peril unmatched by any other in history.

The problem is the peculiar slippage, where consensus turns inexorably to hopelessness. It's a pattern we can see with inequality: after decades of fighting over whether or not it existed, we finally alighted on the broadly-agreed notion that inequality was bad for the wellbeing of people at every rung.

Almost immediately, the problem became too large to manage, as if the very act of agreeing about it turned it into a *gestalt*, whole-world fact, an act of God that no mere mortal could change. All solutions sounded either pathetically small (better bus routes) or frighteningly large (tear down the system and start again).

The same pattern is emerging with climate change: we know that individual solutions aren't enough. We've been recycling for years and it hasn't made any difference. We know it needs change at a systems level, but it has become so politically normal to make big promises and do nothing that we don't believe politicians are constitutionally capable of action. We know that one nation can't do anything on its own, but we've also seen how hard it is to get a globe working in concert. We know that our system is stacked with false incentives, extractive industries, needless production, investments in fossil fuels which, if their value were ever realised, would fry the lot of us, but we can't conceive of an alternative that doesn't look like the stone age. *If you've made it to the end of this paragraph, I salute you: I succumbed to despair two points ago.*

And yet, there is a way to talk about this – specifically, for politicians to talk about it, since they're the ones at the steering wheel – that would transform our perception of the environment, from this tragic gallows of our own making, to a site of genuine hope and ambition. It's not with Cameronesque gimmicks (I can neither forgive nor forget the huskies), nor Johnsonian political expedience, full of green guff one minute, tax cuts and inaction the next.

First, emphasise how much a government – when it is determined, when it isn't distracted – is capable of.

The 2008 Climate Change Act, aiming to reduce carbon emissions by at least 26% by 2020 and at least 80% by 2050, was a good thing. The targets weren't ambitious enough, and the governments since 2010 have not been competent enough. But we met the first two carbon budgets, and are set to meet the third.

Emissions in 2018 were 44% lower than they were in 1990. Specific industries have soared, thanks to provisions spurred by that Act (in fact, if we want to get personal, spurred by Ed Miliband, then secretary of state for energy and climate change, who may turn out to have done something far more significant for the future than winning an election).

This time last year, wind power was delivering 35% of the UK's energy use every week. And that's not even our strongest suit: we have 50% of Europe's potential tidal energy, 9% of the world's.

To put this in perspective, it is like taking silver at the Olympics for rowing, then finding out you are even better at karate. This is replicated across Northern Europe – there was a day last year when Denmark exceeded 100% of its energy from wind. Don't get me started on Spain and their solar capacity. There is a very real prospect of an entirely-renewable future, which will arrive even faster with cooperation, supergrids and the grand generosity that comes with a limitless resource.

The future is one not of carbon austerity but of untold prosperity, in which we wouldn't bother with carbon even if we could.

Second, when we say capitalism is standing in the way of these solutions, when we say the entire system needs remaking from the ground up, we've got to get away from the idea that it will feel like being cast out of Eden.

We are not living in some bountiful market, which perfectly orders our lives but has this inconvenient blindspot around fossil fuels.

The old order understands the economy as a market and a state, in which the state tries with varying competence and sincerity to regulate the market, and the market tries – according to your point of view – to evade regulation, out of either greed or desire

THE BIGGEST ISSUE: Exhaust plumes from cooling towers at Germany's Jaenschwalde coal-fired power station. The plant, built by the former East German government in the 1980s, is among the biggest single producers of CO2 emissions in Europe

Photo: Getty Images

up in smoke

to create wealth for all. The narrative follows the exact same tramlines as Wile E Coyote versus Roadrunner, a lot of banging and crashing, never any change or progress. Because of the false binary on which so many discussions are based, we find it hard to conceive anything meaningfully beneficial to the environment that doesn't involve a penalty somewhere else – in higher taxes, or fewer choices. The reality is, there is no fix for the climate that doesn't also involve some other immeasurably life-altering improvement. To take one example: a huge amount of the UK's emissions are related to its housing stock; the country needs a mass programme of retrofitting, alongside new housing built to energy neutral standards, just to nix this pointless waste. Will this also generate thousands of skilled jobs, and provide houses that people can afford to stay warm in? Inevitably, yes: but we'll just have to learn to live with that.

Third, stop saying "change everything" and break it down: a new industrial strategy; a new transport policy; a new stance on agriculture and land use; new models of common ownership, so that the profits of renewable energy are equally distributed; while we're here, a new model of the commons.

It's not just a patch of scrubland that you used to be able to graze a sheep on, before some 13th century bastard fenced it off. Everything of value in the 21st century – from energy to intellectual property, from data to infrastructure – will belong to all of us, if we can just get our acts together.

Fourth, stop worrying about what we can and can't afford. The only thing we really can't afford is inaction. Besides, if Brexit taught us anything, it's that governments can miraculously always find the money for something they want hard enough. Let's make the next thing we want that hard to be the future of the planet, rather than… well, never mind what Brexit was.

Fifth, stop saying net zero: *net* is a sly word, forever associated with the amount you thought something was going to cost, before they added VAT. *Zero* isn't a goal, it's an absence of goals. *Decarbonise* is sexier, with the science-ish overtone of a plan that someone, somewhere knows how to achieve.

There is a pervasive sense of insecurity about the future; you hear it everywhere. You hear it from school kids and in business podcasts (that you accidentally listened to, while you were looking for some true crime). You hear it from local councils and radical protesters. None of it is crazy, or irrational. Apocalyptic scenarios could come to pass, and in places already have. But agreement is turning into acceptance, which is a mournful, arid territory. We need to start fighting for optimism – which, finally, might be a fight we actually enjoy.

Johnson's faded green vision

The prime minister shows no signs that he is up to the challenge presented by climate change, says CATHERINE ROWETT

Has Boris Johnson ever spoken an honest truth? I don't mean an accidental one, uttered to deceive but failing in its intention, but a genuine avowal of his own honest opinion? It's possible that one such truth may have inadvertently crossed his lips in the admission that he "doesn't really get" climate change, as reported by Claire O'Neill after her abrupt sacking as head of the COP26 climate summit.

Her dismissive remarks might sound like a case of sour grapes, if it wasn't for the wealth of supporting evidence suggesting the prime minister really doesn't understand the task in front of him when it comes to environment. Right now, Johnson's failure to grasp the climate emergency is possibly more scary than any of his other multitudinous lies that have harmed UK politics since he opted to campaign for Brexit in 2016. Scary, because as we approach COP26, to be hosted in Glasgow in November, all the signs are that the prime minister is destined to fluff this great opportunity.

The conference should have been the moment for Britain to step up on to the world stage and lead the way forward from 2016's Paris Agreement and the last session in Madrid: to reiterate and embed the lessons of science; secure international cooperation; speed up the process of setting and meeting ambitious targets; and get every country in the world on board, including reluctant ones including Brazil, Colombia, Argentina and Australia.

The only chance of a breakthrough is with preliminary diplomacy in these crucial parts of the globe. Sacking the conference coordinator with 10 months to go does not inspire confidence or a sense of leadership. As the COP26 host, we need a prime minister who understands what a climate emergency is.

Johnson has been trying to burnish his credentials this week, with the decision to proceed with HS2 and to invest £5 billion over five years to improve cycling and bus services, including 4,000 "zero-carbon" vehicles. Yes, this indicates that someone understands that the UK is at a standstill because of its woeful failure to invest properly in mass transit systems and reliable networks that outperform car travel. That's good news indeed, but let's just check whether the proposals provide real solutions, and if so, solutions to what exactly?

HS2 splits opinion between those who are thrilled and those who are appalled. The enthusiasts are those who think that what's needed is to move more people around faster and with less crowding. The opponents see that the real challenge is to reduce the demand for fast travel and find zero carbon solutions.

FLUFFING IT: Prime minister Boris Johnson Photo: Getty Images

HS2 is not a zero carbon means to anything, least of all to shifting people from cars into trains (for that we need plentiful short haul trains from people's actual homes, to where they actually want to be, not via London, and not especially fast). Any ordinary train is faster, more reliable, and less hassle for the passenger, than running a car. It need not go at 225mph. Nor will HS2 reduce domestic flights. To do that, we should either abolish those altogether (after all, why not?) or price them properly.

For sure, there's a vociferous technophile pro-HS2 lobby whose letters I expect to see here next week. They are prepared to destroy woods and chalk streams to secure their short ride in a fast machine. Their enthusiasm occasionally tries to dress itself in green, but HS2 will do nothing for the UK's carbon emissions, except perhaps increase them.

What about the zero emissions buses? Beware the term "zero-emissions". It probably hides something quite sinister, namely the misconception that hydrogen-powered vehicles have a zero-emissions energy source. Yes, there are no emissions from the vehicle itself – helpful if your problem is urban air quality – but hydrogen is not a source of energy. It's an extremely inefficient way of storing energy, taking far more power to make than is obtained from using it, and it is only as clean as the energy used to produce and deliver it. And the £5bn pledged in this area is only a fraction of the investment required.

What the UK really needs – to go alongside a transport revolution – is renewable energy and a commitment to reduce demand. Certainly shifting from cars to buses and trains helps. But we also need huge reductions in air travel, a freeze on airport expansion, insulation for buildings and an end to gas boilers.

We need subsidies, for renewables, not for gas or coal or oil or shale gas or any other new-fangled, so-called low carbon systems. And, above all, a complete moratorium on new nuclear, which, like HS2, is a false diversion that pretends to be a solution.

New nuclear power is too slow, too expensive (currently twice the price of offshore wind but with a scheduled rise in price that looks set to make it perhaps 100 times more expensive, if not more, than real renewables) and has a huge carbon footprint in the construction.

Where then is the investment in very low-cost local installations, in good sources of background energy such as tidal and wave power, in energy storage?

What a mess! How can we claim to be global leaders in the fight against climate change, with such a confused, sometimes contradictory strategy?

So no. This government, and its prime minister, does not get the climate thing. Not at all.

■ Catherine Rowett was a Green MEP for East of England from 2019 to 2020

Who has the primary force?

PETE
2020
STUDENTS FOR PETE
PETE
2020

There is a strategy that could defeat Trump, says PAUL CONNEW. But is there a candidate who could do so?

"So where the hell do we go from here? Unless we get our act together fast we're gifting Trump a second term and that really will be hell." The words of a senior Democrat strategist I've known for more than 20 years who played significant roles in the campaigns of Obama and both Clintons. Normally no pessimist, or defeatist, he confesses to "creeping depression" over the prospect of the party achieving at the ballot box in November what it failed to do in the principled, but inevitably doomed, impeachment attempt.

The combination of that ill-fated effort and the humiliation heaped on the Democrats by the Iowa caucus debacle – where the results were delayed for days by technical issues – has sent the party into panicked contemplation that their prospects of dumping Trump this year are fast receding.

The confused result from the Hawkeye State meant none of the Democrat candidates emerged with much momentum and apart from incompetency the other take-away from the contest for watching Americans was the division and rancour the selection process is generating in the party.

Trump, meanwhile, has been relishing the Democrat discomfort, leaping on Nancy Pelosi's petulant ripping up of his State of the Union speech to rile his base and sending a particularly gloating tweet – an animation of election placards reading Trump 2020, Trump 2024, Trump 2028, etc, etc, an age of Trump stretching endlessly into the future.

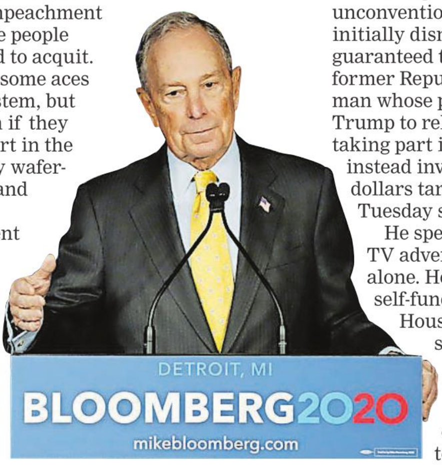
Interestingly, when I knew him well back in his controversial, colourful business tycoon days, Trump told me the two-term presidential limit was "crap". He held the same opinion about the electoral college system and insisted the president should be elected by the popular vote. No wonder he wasted millions of taxpayers' dollars trying to prove he really didn't lose the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by a cool three million plus.

If one thing is already certain about this November's election, it is that Trump will again lose the popular vote, probably by a substantially larger margin. That might annoy him once again, but it will not necessarily deny him another term in the White House.

To do that, the Democrats desperately need to discover some momentum and find a way to ultimately heal the party's divisions. This week's primary in New Hampshire – where the surprise strong showing by Amy Klobuchar has further confused the picture – has done little to galvanise things, so all hope is resting on "Super Tuesday", March 3, when 14 states hold their primary elections. On a single day, some 34% of delegates to the Democrats Convention in Milwaukee in July will be selected.

Despite the gloom among Democrat strategists and the state of the candidates' misfiring campaigns, not all hope is lost. The 48 senators who voted to convict the president in his impeachment trial represent 18 million more people than the 52 senators who voted to acquit. The president certainly holds some aces under the electoral college system, but the Democrats can unseat him if they can mobilise maximum support in the key states that swung (often by wafer-thin margins) behind Trump and against Clinton in 2016.

There is some encouragement for the party in polls showing that in some of those states – such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania – health care is ranked by voters as their issue of greatest concern. This is a policy area where Trump has lamentably failed and on which he will not relish a battle.



GAINING GROUND: Billionaire Democrat presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg is a former Republican mayor of New York
Photo: Getty Images

So, if the outline of a potentially-winning strategy is starting to emerge, who might be best placed to lead it? (Incidentally, that may not be the exact question that the primary process is going to answer. It might be that the Democrats' ultimate choice is not necessarily the best man or woman to take the fight to Trump. But that will be an argument for historians to have.)

Things will certainly be a lot clearer after Super Tuesday. And by then we will also finally be able to assess Mike Bloomberg's chances of success. In an unconventional strategy most experts initially dismissed as too risky and guaranteed to flop, the media tycoon and former Republican New York mayor – a man whose personal wealth reduces Trump to relative pauper – eschewed taking part in the early primaries and instead invested tens of millions of dollars targeting the crucial Super Tuesday states.

He spent $10million on a 60-second TV advert during the Super Bowl alone. He's also making great play of self-funding his tilt at the White House, a novel case of a tycoon shunning big bucks donations from other tycoons and corporate behemoths. At the last count, the Bloomberg campaign team has swelled to more than 2,100 staffers, 400 at his New York campaign HQ and 1,700 (growing daily) across 125 hi-tech rich offices across the country.

Suddenly, both Democrat and Republican strategists are privately shifting their view of Bloomberg's candidacy as a doomed vanity project. Unsurprisingly, his unconventional run is infuriating his Democrat rivals. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren – both from the left of the party – have accused him of spending millions to "buy" the election. His opponents were particularly furious after Bloomberg was given permission to take part in a TV debate in Nevada this month despite not being on the ballot there. "I guess if you're worth $55billion you can get the rules changed," Sanders mused.

Among supporters of both Sanders and Warren, the hostility to Bloomberg is visceral and many Democrat strategists warn that he will alienate many younger voters the party needs to mobilise, both at the ballot box and on the campaign trail.

Yet other senior party powerbrokers are giving serious thought to throwing their weight behind Bloomberg, concerned both by the flagging campaign of Joe Biden, the 77-year-old longtime frontrunner from the centre of the party – who frequently looks and sounds rattled on the stump – and the fear that Sanders (or Warren) would suffer a similar fate against Trump as Jeremy Corbyn did at

SURPRISE PACKAGE: Democrat presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg salutes supporters during his caucus night watch party in Des Moines, Iowa, on February 3

Photo: Getty Images

the hands of Boris Johnson (though both senators are significantly less radical than the outgoing Labour leader).

And what of Pete Buttigieg, the surprise package from South Bend, Indiana, who – along with Sanders – has at least salvaged something from the Iowa car crash wreckage which he carried into New Hampshire (the former came top in first primary with the latter second – the positions were swapped in the second vote)? Much has been made of Buttigieg's personal background – he is a married, gay man – and how this might play out among voters and in a race against Trump. Less discussed, but just as relevant, are his lousy polling figures among black Democrat voters, a legacy of mishandling marijuana policy and the shooting of a black man by police when he was mayor of South Bend, for which he has subsequently apologised.

Currently Buttigieg trails Sanders, Biden, Warren and Bloomberg badly among the black vote and Mayor Pete needs to change a lot of minds before Super Tuesday to keep his challenge going. Meanwhile, Trump awaits. The primary process has given him plenty of material to use against whoever his opponent is. Those desperate to see him on his way out of the White House by the end of the year are just hoping that Democrats don't give him any more ammunition.

The silent state

Bonnie Greer

US POLITICS, STATE-BY-STATE: WASHINGTON

It is easy to believe that the movie *Sleepless In Seattle* might be the quintessential Washington State movie.

But the 1993 romcom is not about the 42nd state of the Union. It is really about a long-distance love affair that reaches its moment of discovery at New York City's Empire State Building. In a sense, Seattle becomes, in the hands of the film's East Coast writers, the furthest place from America that America can be.

And technically, this is almost true.

Washington, officially known as the State of Washington, so as not to confuse it with the national capital, is the northwestern-most constituent of what is called the contiguous United States.

This contiguous United States consists of the 48 adjoining US states on the continent of North America, plus Washington DC.

And there could be a reason why the State of Washington might be remote in the minds of many Americans: its distance from Florida is roughly that of the UK to Greenland. This may be one of the reasons that the name of Seattle, the state's most populous city, was used as a metaphor about a long-distance romance.

The Pacific is to the west of the state; Idaho to the east; Oregon to the south and the Canadian province of British Columbia to the north. Washington is a leading producer of lumber. The largest number of apples in the US also come from here; and that huge haul can be applied to pears; hops; sweet cherries; grapes; lentils; potatoes. Its waters are also rich in salmon and halibut. And the only state that outranks it in wine production is California.

The state manufactures ships and missiles. It produces chemicals, machinery and metal products. It has 1,000 dams, chief among these the mighty Grand Coulee Dam, a concrete monster constructed on the Columbia River to provide hydroelectric power, irrigation, flood control and water storage. It has been controversial from its inception, in the early 20th century.

The indigenous people of the state suffered grave consequences as a result. Their way of life revolved around salmon fishing. The Grand Coulee Dam blocks fish migration. The dam also flooded 21,000 acres where indigenous people had lived for thousands of years.

Settlements and graves had to be relocated. Towns were submerged which had large indigenous populations. There was a "Ceremony of Tears" in the summer of 1940, seven years after construction began and two years before the dam was opened.

Yet the Grand Coulee helps make the state one of the wealthiest in the country. Washington is also one of the most progressive.

It ranks among the highest in life expectancy and the lowest in unemployment. It was one of the first to legalise medical and recreational cannabis. It was among the first to legalise same-sex marriage. It provided legal abortions on request before the Supreme Court ruling on Roe v Wade in 1973 loosened abortion laws nationwide.

In a 2008 referendum, it approved physician-assisted suicide. It is one of eight states that has criminalised the sale, possession and transfer of bump stocks – the tech that is used to boost a gun's fire power.

Washington's governor, Jay Inslee, is a Democrat who ran for president briefly in the current election cycle. His platform – combat climate change. He left the trail last year and is now seeking his third term in the governor's mansion in Olympia, the state capital.

The state's senators are Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell. Both are Democrats, both voted in the senate to convict and remove Donald Trump.

In the House, Washington is represented by three Republicans and seven Democrats, including Pramila Jayapal. She is the first woman from her district to serve in Congress and the first Asian-American to represent the state. She is a vocal supporter of Bernie Sanders and a frequent Trump critic on TV.

In the 2016 election, Washington's eight electoral college votes went to Hillary Clinton who took 1,742,718 votes (54.30%) compared to Trump's 1,221,747 (38.07%) of the vote. He and the state are no fans of each other.

In fact, it is not clear if he has ever visited the state as president, since he only goes to places that like him. Last September, one Washington State paper made five guesses as to why he skipped the area when he visited California: 1) California had more conservative multimillionaires. 2) His people booked the Tacoma Dome for two nights, but Elton John refused to give up his two nights there. 3) He was upset that the Department of Fish and Wildlife would not issue special fishing permits for Donald and Eric Trump. 4) Hurricane Dorian was on its way. 5) The governor and attorney general were building a wall out of all the lawsuits they had filed against his administration.

Yet all is not jokey and rosy in the Evergreen State. The governor recently pointed out that the state needs more affordable housing. It needs shelter relief for the homeless. Housing is a huge problem in the State of Washington. Better mental-health care facilities are needed. The opioid crisis in the state has to be tackled. Worker-training and career-training has to be addressed. His opponents tell him that his climate-crisis solutions are not considered radical enough.

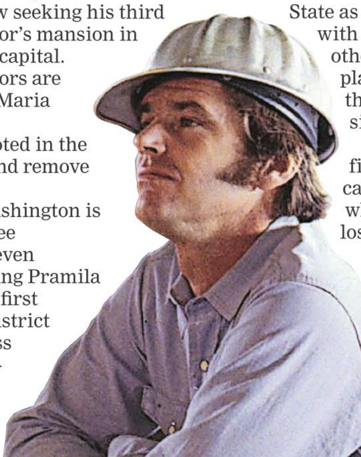
And so the complexities of this rich and complex state are not best understood through Tom Hanks' lonely widower and the unexpected love affair of *Sleepless In Seattle*.

The state might be summed up in Bob Rafelson's complex masterpiece signalling the "New Hollywood" of the late 1960s and early 1970s – *Five Easy Pieces*, starring Jack Nicholson at the beginning of his ascendancy, *pictured*.

In the film, Nicholson is Bobby Eroica Dupea, an oil-rigger, leading a precarious and fairly nomadic life. He returns to his elegant family home in Washington State to see his ailing father who can no longer recognise him. And he also returns to his old wish to be a classical pianist.

Even though it was shot mainly in Vancouver, in neighbouring British Columbia, the film portrays Washington State as a land of deep forests filled with a kind of mystery and otherness. There is a plainspokenness in the film that sometimes falls into silence.

Maybe that silence is filled with a sound that we cannot hear: the sound of what the indigenous people lost. And are still fighting for. Or that silence is the struggle of the wildlife to survive. Or of a homeless person on the streets of Seattle, sitting in silence on a street corner.



WASHINGTON

1889

Known as the Evergreen State, Washington was originally intended to be called Columbia, for the Columbia river which runs through it. But this was considered too close to the District of Columbia (the national capital, which contains the city of Washington). Instead, it was named... Washington. Concern over confusion continued, however, and there were suggestions it should be renamed Tacoma. Around 60% of Washington's residents live in the Seattle area.

Far-right at root of German gloom

The political crisis gripping the country demonstrates the difficulty it has faced in dealing with the rise of the AfD party. JOHN KAMPFNER reports

After enjoying the spectacle of Britain's Brexit morass, it's Germany's turn to indulge in some political chaos of its own.

The resignation of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, or AKK as she has come to be known, as the ruling party's candidate for chancellor, has thrown open the battle to succeed Angela Merkel. It has further undermined the incumbent's position. And it has demonstrated how terrifyingly difficult it is for mainstream political parties across Europe to deal with the incumbents on the far right.

The history in brief: regional elections at the end of October in Thuringia, one of five new states inherited from the former GDR, deprived all the main parties of the votes they needed to govern effectively. The previous prime minister, Bodo Ramelow, came from Die Linke, the Left party that had its roots in the former Communist SED. However, he was generally regarded as a moderate and was relatively popular. It was assumed that he would be appointed again, with the support from the Greens, SPD and even the CDU if necessary. Anyone but the AfD.

What happened next was extraordinary for a country that prides itself on a political culture that embraces consensus and shuns surprises. Unbeknown to the powers that be in Berlin, it was announced that an almost unheard of politician from the pro-business liberal party, the FDP, had won the vote in the regional parliament. Thomas Kemmerich, its leader, had sneaked in thanks to support from the far-right AfD and also from Merkel's own CDU. The FDP had only just got over the 5% threshold of the vote needed to enter parliament. Nobody in Germany had taken office with a mandate as flimsy as this. And, crucially, nobody had taken office thanks to the blessing of the AfD.

The usually icily calm Merkel was furious, saying such a decision was "unforgivable". AKK, who had taken over from her as party chairwoman in 2018 as a precursor to succeeding her as chancellor, ordered the local party to change its mind. It refused. Her authority was publicly undermined.

It has long been an article of faith among the CDU, FDP and the Social Democrats, the "people's parties" endorsed by the Allies straight after the war, that they do not engage with extremist fringe groupings.

It was a taboo even to contemplate joining a coalition with the AfD, at national or regional level. The CDU bosses in Thuringia defied these strictures, conspiring with the AfD to push Kemmerich, someone they assumed they could control. In his campaign materials, Kemmerich had played on the idea that he was a reliable centrist and had no truck with extremists. One of his posters showed him standing with his back to the camera, the focus on his bald head. It was captioned: "Finally, a skinhead who paid attention in history classes."

The AfD has surged in popularity, one of the most visible and frightening examples of the resurgence of the far-right across Europe. At the 2017 general election it became the largest opposition party in the Bundestag. It is represented in each of the 16 regional parliaments. In most regional elections over the last year or two it has come a close second, increasing its share of the vote sharply. Thuringia is a particularly controversial state. Just over half its voters seem to have given up on the old established parties, giving either the Linke or AfD their support.

The AfD is not homogenous. Some of its politicians could be described as just-about-respectable – although that is a bit of a stretch. Others are clearly not. Its boss in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, is the most extreme of the lot, regarded as the most divisive politician in the country. He has established a faction within the party called "the Wing", which is seeking to push it to ever more radical positions.

Whenever he goes on stage or on television, he loves to whip up his audiences – those who love and those who loathe him. He has called for a "180-degree turnaround" in the way Germany looks at its past, and he regularly uses expressions like "degenerate" or "total victory" in his speeches – despite the fact that as a former history teacher he must know which dark chapter of German history he is conjuring up.

He calls the established parties "the old parties", the term used to denigrate mainstream politicians during the Weimar Republic. In one infamous TV interview, he was asked by the moderator whether his use of terms with overt Nazi associations such as *Lebensraum* ("living space") was entirely accidental. Höcke said politicians should express themselves "in original ways". When his aide then tried to change the tenor of the discussion and the presenter refused, Höcke walked off the set.

RESIGNATION: Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, left, is no longer in line to replace German chancellor Angela Merkel

Photo: Getty Images

Merkel has made it clear that, on her watch, the CDU will not engage with the AfD on any terms. The more intriguing and potentially alarming question is: what happens when she's gone? She had hoped that by picking AKK, her party would stick to the same line on this and on many other issues (such as on economic policy and relations with Russia and China). But AKK never cut through. Her public appearances have been wooden. So concerned was Merkel at the loss of status of her handpicked successor that she appointed her also as defence minister in a bid to give her more profile. This partially succeeded and AKK saw off her critics at the CDU's annual party conference in Leipzig. But it was a temporary reprieve. She was the one to carry the can for the Thuringia debacle.

The party will convene a special conference in a few months' time to choose the man to take over from Merkel, in time for the general election in the second half of 2021. I say man, because the four candidates being spoken of are all men. That said, they are not identikit.

Armin Laschet, prime minister of the most populous state, North Rhine Westphalia, has been winning plaudits. With the loss of AKK, he would be seen as the continuity candidate. He has consistently defended Merkel's refugee policy in the face of growing public disquiet.

Markus Söder runs Bavaria, a significant role given that the state has more autonomy than the others, and his party, the CSU, is a separate sister party to the CDU. He was quickest to condemn the Thuringia stitch-up. His political

EXTREMIST: AfD's Björn Höcke meets supporters at a campaign meeting in Brandenburg, Germany, in August 2019 Photo: Getty Images

positioning is canny, given that Bavaria is known to be staunchly conservative.

The fly in the ointment is Friedrich Merz, the most right-wing and pro-free market of the candidates, who lost out to AKK during the 2018 leadership vote. His appointment would mark a break from Merkel's consensual approach. While he might bring some AfD voters back into the fold, he would alienate others in the centre. Merz quit the Bundestag to take up a lucrative post at BlackRock, a decision that didn't go down well with many voters.

They all stand a reasonably even chance. The candidate most talked about, however, is Jens Spahn, health minister and one of the first openly gay senior politicians in Germany. In 2002, he was the youngest MP at 22 and is seen as a consummate operator. He got away with criticising the refugee influx – even while in Merkel's cabinet – but has since mellowed.

A key factor in the CDU's deliberations will be the ability to strike a coalition deal with the Greens. In amongst a sense of gloom about the state of the parties and the rise of the AfD, the rise of the Greens is remarkable. It is eminently possible that they – not either of the four candidates – could end up succeeding Merkel to the chancellorship. The CDU would then have to get used to being the junior partner.

The Instagram row asking serious questions of France

JASON WALSH on *l'affaire Mila*... how a teenage girl prompted a frenzied national debate

One minute she was a typical youth: 16 years old, just another teenager singing into a camera and chatting online. Now she's known across France, loved and loathed in equal measure, facing death threats, living under police protection and rapidly being transformed into a symbol of the yawning chasm in the country's political life.

Mila (due to French privacy law her surname has not been reported, even though she has since appeared on television) owes her fame to a livestream she made on Instagram last month. A chat with her followers turned into an unpleasant spat with one of them about dating preferences, and descended quickly and deeply into a harsh exchange of words in which she made insulting remarks about Islam.

As the video started to spread online and stir up controversy, Mila doubled down with a second clip in which she was quite explicit – and obscene – about her "hatred" of Islam. "I said what I think, you are not going to make me regret it. There are people who are going to get angry [but] clearly I don't give a damn, I say what I want, what I think."

What started as just another online drama really got going when Abdallah Zekri, the general delegate of the French Council for Muslim Faith (CFCM), told Sud Radio (South Radio) that the youth had "asked for it [verbal abuse]".

"You reap what you sow," he said, adding that he was nonetheless "against" the death threats she had started to receive. His colleague Mohammed Moussaoui, CFCM chairman, posted a tweet that "nothing justifies the death threats against a person, no matter how serious her comments were". Zekri later withdrew his remarks.

Nonetheless, the teenager was transformed into public property and, worse still, a symbol of a riven France. She is now living under police protection and has changed schools.

Nevertheless, as the story escalated into a political storm that has consumed the nation, the teenaged Mila has remained at the centre of it. She appeared on the news debate programme *Quotidien avec Yann Barthès* (*Daily, with Yann Barthès*) on television channel TMC (Television Monte Carlo) to tell her side of the story of the original incident.

"A guy was hitting on me heavily during the live [stream]," said Mila, who is gay, "telling me 'you're beautiful, you're hot, what age are you?'

"He told me that he didn't particularly like *rebeus* [Arabs] or black girls. So I told him it was the same for me, that it was not particularly my style. And this boy, who was flirting with me at the start, started insulting me [saying] 'dirty whore, dirty lesbian, dirty racist' and so on. And he insulted me a lot in the name of Allah."

She went on: "My life is clearly on break. Whether it's my social life, on social networks, in my schooling […] I was not safe in my establishment [school]," she told Yann Barthès. "I could have been burned with acid, I could have been hit. I was threatened with being stripped naked in public, even being buried alive. I was not safe, I had to drop out of school."

A police investigation is under way into the series of online death threats she received, while one into Mila herself, for "provoking hatred against a group of people on the grounds of their belonging to a particular race or religion", was dismissed by the office of the public prosecutor.

Politicians on all sides have piled in to *l'affaire Mil*a. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen lauded her in a Twitter post, saying: "This young girl is braver than the whole political class in power over the past 30 years." Centre-left Ségolène Royal, a former and possible future presidential candidate, said that while she supported "total" freedom of speech "respect, manners and knowledge" were essential.

Justice minister Nicole Belloubet declared the death threats "unacceptable in a democracy", but said Mila's comments were "clearly an infringement on freedom of conscience". Christian Jacob, president of the centre-right Republican party, described Belloubet's stance as "scandalous", and called on French president Emmanuel Macron to intervene.

The justice minister's opinion is at the crux of the matter: in fact, Belloubet appears to be wrong. According to the letter of French law, it is permissible to criticise or insult a religion. The only prohibition is against insulting, defaming or discriminating against the followers of a religion.

Unintentionally, Mila has waded into a debate that has riven France for more than two decades: whether this freedom to blaspheme and offend will remain is the touch paper that has now been lit.

The ideology of *laïcité* is central to French life and politics. Unlike British secularism, where referring to belief is simply considered *déclassé*, or American secularism where politics and religion are, in theory at least, kept apart for the benefit of both, *laïcité* is militant. Where Anglophones might say church and state should be separate, the French say that while you can believe whatever you want, organised religion can, well, go and do one. As a result, Mila's provocative remarks sound a lot worse to English speakers than to Francophones. Or, rather, such remarks used to. Opinion appears to be changing in France today.

In response to the row, the newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* – 12 of whose staff were murdered by Islamist terrorists in 2015 following the newspaper publishing cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad – commissioned a poll which found that support for prohibition of blasphemy is growing, particularly among young people. A full 50% of those polled supported the outlawing of blasphemous speech.

The newspaper responded with a double page spread of blasphemous cartoons, tracing the history of mocking religion including highlights such as the Marquis de Sade, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, and writers Dante and Flaubert.

Unsurprisingly, the media has been in overdrive over *l'affaire Mil*a. Right-wing polemicist Éric Zemmour wrote in national daily *Le Figaro* that, while her words were "closer to rapper's belching than to Chateaubriand's prose", her misfortune was insightful for everyone else: "She did not insult France, the police or Catholicism, but Islam. We know the rest. From there, the reactions and the camps were defined and separated." He went on to complain that young French Arabs engaged in street harassment, and that feminist politicians seemed less concerned about that, reigniting a debate that seemed to consume Paris in recent years.

Social media, meanwhile, gives the impression that the rest of the country has been similarly polarised, with competing Twitter hashtags #JeSuisMila and #JeNeSuisPasMila declaring support for and opposition to the teenager and everything for which she has come to stand.

As for Mila herself, her latest remarks are rather more conciliatory – but still clearly French. "I never wanted to target human beings. I wanted to blaspheme. I wanted to speak about a religion and say what I think," she said.

She certainly did that. And, in doing, so, prompted a very 21st century debate, about issues that have troubled the French republic since its creation.

STORM: French teenager Mila Photo: Television Monte Carlo

LETTERS: Have your say, email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk

Is associate citizenship just Remainer cakeism?

This feels like an appropriate time to begin a campaign in favour of Guy Verhofstadt's idea of individual associate membership of the EU for UK citizens who wish to apply for it.

I feel that many of us would accept having to pay privately for citizenship; perhaps an annual fee ranging between 500-1,000 euros to cover costs. This payment would give us an European ID card and guarantee free movement. Surely the Brexiters could not object to this as it would not cost them anything?

SE Vickery

Ursula von der Leyen says the EU remains "very open" to the idea of associate citizenship but there is considerable confusion and some scepticism about the idea around the EU parliament.

Could I therefore encourage *TNE* readers to join the 115,000 who have already signed a petition at www.stayeuropean.org asking the EU to create a formal scheme to which we can sign up?

Helen Walker
Nottingham

I don't see how associate EU citizenship for UK individuals will work, or why it should work. The EU is a noble idea of freedom for all peoples. Its impact and ambition must not be reduced to being an easy passage to living and collecting your UK pension abroad.

Why should I, a British man, have the right to buy citizenship to 27 countries when a man in, say, Poland does not have the right to buy into mine?

This is no doubt coming from the right place, but Remainer cakeism nonetheless.

Mark Bates

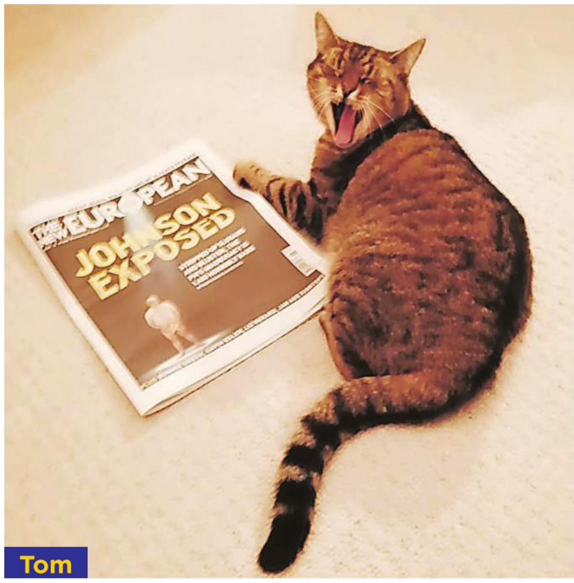
Bridge of sighs

As Boris Johnson careens into the strange bundle of policies-no-one-asked-for courtesy of Dominic Cummings, I note HS2 is to proceed on the age old basis of well-we've-started-now. More worryingly, he is also continuing with his irrational bridges fetish.

As if the Garden Bridge debacle wasn't enough, he is now planning to spend feasibility money on investigating whether a bridge can be built between Scotland and Northern Ireland. What he will prove once more is just how feasible it is for him to waste public money.

Ignoring the fact that no one wants or has ever asked for a bridge between Scotland and Ireland and it is an engineering nightmare and would involve – even if it were logistically possible – building over Second World War munitions dumps – I have one question to ask. Will we also be getting Space Force?

Amanda Baker
Edinburgh



Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN

This is five-year-old Tom, three-legged owner of Vic and Judith, expressing his horror at Johnson's exposure.

■ Does the animal who runs your household read *TNE*? Send photographic evidence and crucial biographical details to letters@theneweuropean.co.uk, putting 'Animal Readers' in the subject field.

Baby gloom

Francis Beckett's article ("Blame us baby boomers for Brexit", *TNE* #180) was insulting. I am sick of being told my generation had it so good and easy and are responsible for leaving the EU.

Analysis of the referendum revealed that people in all age groups who had not had a higher education were more likely to have voted Leave. Despite us "being paid to go to university"; the majority of people in the older group did *not* get a higher education.

Most of the people I started school with left at 15. Of the 70 or so who stayed until age 18 at my grammar school *five* went on to university.

I have attended every march for Remain and have forwarded hundreds of pounds to the Remain campaigns. Please do not blame me for what has happened.

Perhaps if the younger generation had got off their mobiles for half an hour and actually gone and talked to their grandparents this might have been averted.

Carol Green
Oxford

I'm 67. I voted Remain. I spent endless hours way into the dead of night writing letters, sending emails, signing petitions, communicating with my staunchly pro-Remain MP, and did everything I personally could to prevent this catastrophe.

Everyone I know voted and I don't know of a single person in my age group who voted Leave (nor for Boris and the Tories). Not one. I'm not blaming anyone else's generation… but please don't blame me or mine.

Charles Wunderman

'Our' generation (I was born in 1953) cannot be described as an entity without variation. Some families benefited from the new council housing, and others from recovering industry. We all benefited from the NHS to some degree, but poverty endured until the 1970s.

We did not dictate the rising prices of housing. This was engineered by developers, land and estate agents, governments and venture capitalists. If we benefited from rising prices we still had to pay an inflated price for our new house.

And as a young person, I was certainly not "free from worry"; campaigning for environmental issues in the 1970s, worried about nuclear war and the likelihood of unemployment, most of us didn't go to university.

If Beckett thinks that post-war children "kicked away our children's legs and sneer at them for being lame" he is living in an universe parallel to my own. I struggled very hard to support my son in university and for a couple of years after he graduated, and my experience was not unusual.

Linda Johns
Gazeley

Yet another commentator ascribing blame for the present situation to everyone who had the temerity to be born in a particular generation. I suggest there will be many so-called "boomers" among your readers who do not feel responsible for Brexit as they have put time and energy into opposing it for the sake of the younger generation.

Jenny Walton
Ormskirk

Submissive Saj

Your cartoon by Tim Bradford (*TNE* #181) features a caricature of Sajid Javid, compliantly proclaiming, "I will say anything I am told"'. As one of Mr Javid's constituents, I can confirm that every letter we've written to our local MP has been responded to in textbook party line prose.

It is pointless writing to him because his responses are so predictable. A veritable nodding dog of a frontbencher.

John Smart
Bromsgrove

Water waste

Further evidence of the EU's merits was demonstrated in a recent *Channel 4 News* interview with American environmental lawyer Rob Bilott and actor Mark Ruffalo.

Bilott took on the case of an American farmer whose cattle had been poisoned by a factory, and his fight is depicted in a new film, (*Dark Waters*, where he is played by Ruffalo. The chemical compound responsible is now found in drinking water not only throughout the US, but around the world and the pair went to Brussels to discuss the problem.

"We were in the EU parliament yesterday," said Ruffalo, "and the one thing that was clear was, even if the people sitting there didn't have the same idea of how to make us safe, they wanted to do it. And that was really moving for me."

Only powerful organisations like the EU can effectively combat such existential problems, and promoting it should be everyone's mission instead of damning it.

Rebecca Brown

++GRASSROOTS NOTICEBOARD++

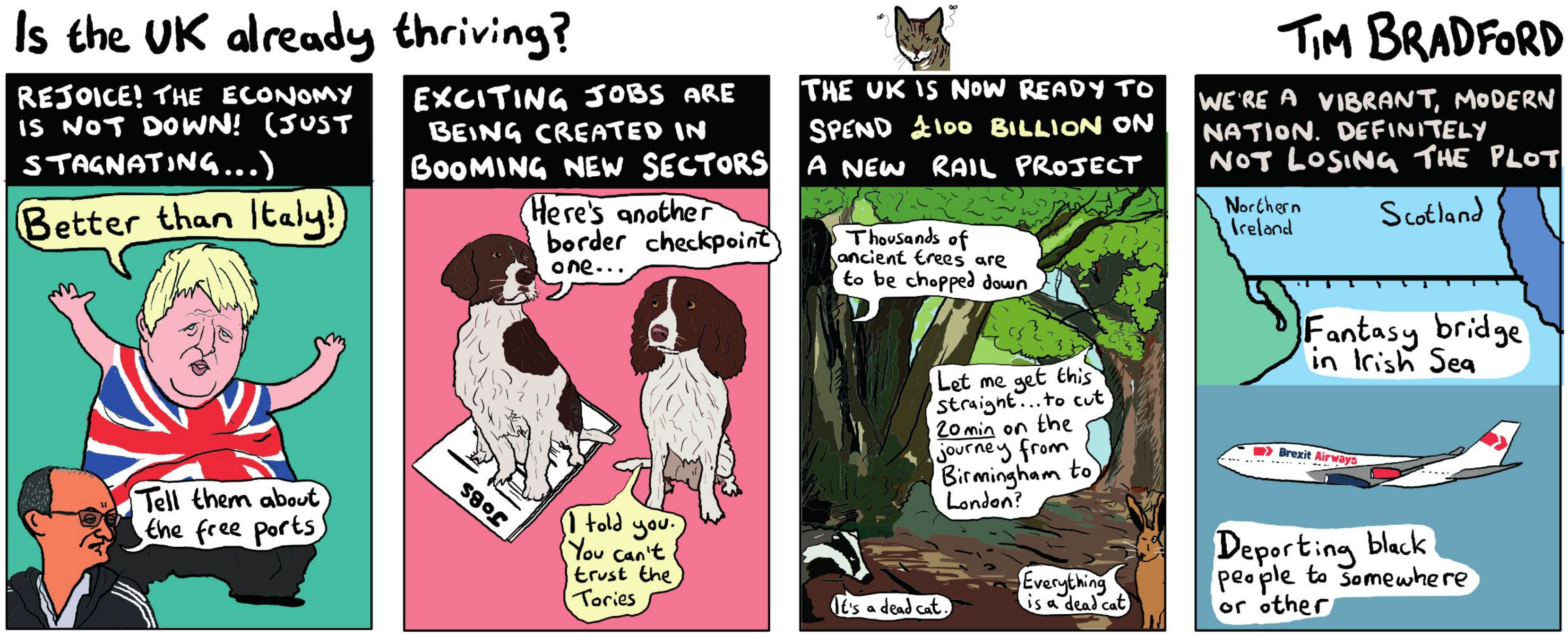
To help keep the pro-European movement connected, we will post information here about forthcoming events each week. Details will also appear on our Facebook page.

Friday, February 21 – Chester for Europe's 'Bring and share' evening with European food and drinks. (The idea is to bring a dish from a European country that people can share.) Numbers are limited so email for more details: chester.remain@gmail.com

Sunday, March 15 - Chester for Europe's European Film night at Chez Jules Chester

Email details about any events to theneweuropean@archant.co.uk

What's going on?


Is the UK already thriving?
TIM BRADFORD
REJOICE! THE ECONOMY IS NOT DOWN! (JUST STAGNATING...)
Better than Italy!
Tell them about the free ports
EXCITING JOBS ARE BEING CREATED IN BOOMING NEW SECTORS
Here's another border checkpoint one...
JOBS
I told you. You can't trust the Tories
THE UK IS NOW READY TO SPEND £100 BILLION ON A NEW RAIL PROJECT
Thousands of ancient trees are to be chopped down
Let me get this straight...to cut 20min on the journey from Birmingham to London?
It's a dead cat.
Everything is a dead cat
WE'RE A VIBRANT, MODERN NATION. DEFINITELY NOT LOSING THE PLOT
Northern Ireland
Scotland
Fantasy bridge in Irish Sea
Brexit Airways
Deporting black people to somewhere or other

I was alarmed to hear of Downing Street's decision to replace Claire Perry O'Neill as president of the climate summit due to take place this November in Glasgow with the betting that her place will be taken by a senior minister.

There is little doubt that this manoeuvre by the Johnson administration is an unashamed attempt to 'take back control' over the handling of one of the most important issues of the day and one where progress is almost certain to upset their well-heeled friends.

On a matter as momentous and urgent as the climate emergency the development and implications of such a move by this right-wing government must be exposed relentlessly to public scrutiny and ruthlessly challenged at every point.

Robert Bell
Glasgow

Bad to worse

It's a funny old world isn't it? Boris Johnson achieves his lifelong ambition to be prime minister because he wasn't Jeremy Corbyn. While Jeremy Corbyn facilitates his lifelong ambition of Brexit because he was Jeremy Corbyn.

A win-win for them, then.

Bob Hale
Portishead

Day of shame

On Brexit Day a few of us brave souls from the group NE4EU travelled the 300 miles down from the north east and ventured into Parliament Square as we wanted our side to also be represented to the world's press. As virtually the only Remainers there, we were photographed and filmed by everyone from the *New York Times* to *India Today*.

However, as the day went on, some of the Leavers acted in a truly disgusting manner towards us, pulling a female member's top open and putting dog poo in her bra, punching our placards aggressively, all accompanied by the most vile verbal abuse (including racist) in an attempt to intimidate even though we were being dignified and peaceful. Police with horses had to restrain them at a candle-lit vigil at Europe House.

In a pub the following day, we were met with filthy looks for our pro-EU clothes and had a stink bomb thrown at us. Scary to think this is the 'winning side'.

Louise Brown
Gateshead

Myth takers

It isn't a matter of wanting leaving the EU to be a success or not ("Every vow they break", Letters, *TNE* #'181). Even if the process seems to be an objective failure it is likely the tabloid press will try to frame it otherwise to create a myth of success.

Politics is fertile ground for myth-making as it can seem to help people rationalise and understand difficult concepts. The tabloid press have created and promoted a variety of myths based on inaccurate or non-existent 'facts'. This has been a key factor in framing the public opinion of the EU – for example the myth of lost sovereignty which ignores the sovereignty the UK gained (but failed to use effectively) over the EU itself.

One recent instructive example is the portrayal of Jeremy Corbyn as coward / chicken who didn't want a general election. Corbyn has many faults but was extremely clear about wanting an election and it was only his lack of trust in Johnson that caused him to delay forcing an election. Despite clear evidence to the contrary the myth gained traction and even prompted other myths. The view that Jo Swinson foolishly forced an election that otherwise wouldn't have happened only makes sense if you accept the Corbyn is a chicken myth.

A crucial part of making a pro-EU case in the future will be identifying and negating such myths.

Alex Tutt

Surely the point is that in terms of its economic cost and our standing in the world, Brexit is already a failure. If you jump off a cliff, you are not going to sprout wings and fly.

Matt Kelly's idea in *TNE* #180 that having fallen off the cliff, we can "re-imagine the NHS to make it once again the best healthcare system in the world" is just dreaming. He omits to say that in order to do that, we need to arduously climb back up the cliff again.

This should not be derided as fighting yesterday's battles, it is simply a need to reverse a gross miscarriage of justice. We need to re-join the EU, and the "enormously positive energy of our Remain movement", to which he pays tribute, must not lose sight of that eventual goal.

John King
Stratford-upon-Avon

Back on the rails

I read Enrica Papa's article ("Could sleeper trains replace air travel?", *TNE* #180) just after returning from Brussels and two days of meetings on that very subject.

The "pessimistic" report on night trains, cited by your contributor, is four years old and things have come on somewhat since then.

With 10 other colleagues from the multi-national 'Back on Track" network I discussed with MEPs, civil servants, NGOs and rail professionals how overnight travel could be made easier to book and more competitive and the role which the EU could play in this respect. We shall follow this up with, among other things, a major conference in Brussels in October.

Meanwhile, a group of German MEPs has launched a petition calling for a Brussels-Berlin night train (now that there is also a Brussels-Vienna night train twice a week). That can also benefit travellers to and from London.

The Dutch are also seeking modal shift to rail for international journeys, having improved services across their border with Germany, and it is planned to extend the Austrian 'Nightjet' train to and from Amsterdam. We look forward to *The New European* continuing to report such moves.

Trevor Garrod
European Rail Campaign (UK)

Joy and pain

Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* has become the unofficial anthem of Remainers but I wonder how many *TNE* readers remember *Song of Joy* by Miguel Rios? I bought this record on its release in 1970, when I was 14! The music is the same and the words are equally inspiring:

"No man must stand alone, With outstretched hands before him. Reach out and take them in yours, With love that endures, Forever more. Then sing a song of joy, For love and understanding".

Could the Regain movement take this on as our anthem?

David Perrin
Bridgend

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Podcast also available on iTunes, Spotify and iOS podcast app

★

Talking politics with the expletive expert

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL meets the actor Brian Cox, to discuss Brexit, Scottish independence and swearing techniques

We love Brian Cox in our house. We loved him before he became a passionate supporter of the People's Vote campaign, and loved him even more after. We loved him before he was a guest on the podcast I do with my daughter Grace, and we loved him even more after several hours in his little Primrose Hill flat recording his views and anecdotes from his long and successful career.

We love him in *Succession*, where he plays media mogul Logan Roy, a man obsessed by his wealth, and the power in politics that his media moguldum gives him. And if there were not enough Rupert Murdoch resonances in that short observation, Roy has several egregious and ambitious children he plays off against each other as they battle for his approval and pole position in the *Succession* stakes when – at times one senses they are willing it on – he dies.

Though he sees the parallels, Cox is keen we should understand a huge difference between Roy and Murdoch. "Logan" – note the first name terms with his character – "made himself. Murdoch was born into it, like Logan's kids were, like Murdoch's kids too, like Trump."

"Is that why he is so horrible to them?"

"You see him as being horrible to them?" asks Cox.

"I do. Vile."

"He does love them, you know. He really does."

"So why is he horrible to them?"

"He is disappointed in them. But he loves them."

"Does he resent them having been born into fame and wealth and success, whereas he had to struggle?"

"Yes, he does. But then he knows they had no choice."

"Does Logan have a favourite of the kids?" Grace asks, like all kids do from time to time.

"Probably Shiv. The father-daughter thing is very strong with him."

We love Brian Cox's back story too. Born in Dundee, the son of a grocer who died when Cox was eight and a mother who had a series of nervous breakdowns and spent considerable time in asylums undergoing ECT, so that young Brian was largely raised by three older sisters. We love that despite those poverty porn elements to his childhood he speaks of it with warmth and love and gratitude for the values it bred in him and what it taught him about the power of community.

We love that he was aged two when he had the first sensation that he wanted to be an actor. "I was the entertainer in the family. They would give me a box and I would stand on it and perform. One of my first memories was of being on that box singing an Al Jolson song and making everyone happy." We love that "I never became a 'luvvie'" and that he hates how the arts has once more become so much the preserve of the rich and the privately educated. We love how proud he is that he made it with the help of a grant and how he lists his artistic heroes as working-class writers David Storey, Alan Bennett, Alan Sillitoe, and working-class actors such as Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay and Richard Harris.

We love that he still hates Brexit – "a massive act of self-harm" – and that at any mention of it, Boris Johnson, David Cameron, Nigel Farage or any other of its architects, the F word comes flying. "That f**ker Farage… Johnson with all his f**king lies… Cameron, what a stupid f**king thing to do!"

The last time I was in his flat was a few months ago when we were making a film fronted by Cox for the People's Vote campaign. "I thought we were going to get there, it was so close," he says. "It makes my blood boil, all the lies, all the promises that aren't going to be kept. That f**ker Farage with his phoney man of the people act, and Johnson pretending that this is the right thing for the country, when the whole thing was a vehicle for him to become prime minister. Brexit makes me so sad about what we have become as a country, and now all that rubbish about Big Ben bongs and new 50p coins and Johnson saying 'let's all put it behind us and get along together'. F**k off!"

We love that he defends the expressive power of well-used swearing. He swears almost as much as Logan Roy, who may not beat Malcolm Tucker when it comes to sweary quantity but beats everyone when it comes to quality. Grace films him on her phone as he takes her through the four basic uses of "f**k off". The standard "F**k off", neither soft not hard. Then full-on, loud, lingering… "F**kooooooooooofffffffff". Then nasty, eyes narrowed, face mean, voice harsh, the expletive sharp… "F**kaawf". Finally, his favourite, what he defines as "Scottish weary", dismissive, almost uncaring… "oh just f**k off".

Our love-in has just a couple of wrinkles in it but he explains them so nicely that there is no love lost. He was an active and committed Labour supporter all his life, until – "you won't like this," he warns me – the Iraq War. Unlike some in the party, however, he does not denounce Tony Blair and all his works because of that one decision and can reel off Labour achievements better than any of the current candidates to succeed Jeremy Corbyn.

He tells us he recently watched the interview I did for *GQ* with Tony online. "It was absolutely fascinating, because you obviously know each other so well. I could see in a way I hadn't seen before his dilemmas, and I could see yours too. There was a part where you were trying to get him to say something bad about Trump and he just wouldn't go there. He said something about 'having to work with everyone' and I could see you wanted him to break free, but he wouldn't and it felt stunted, I found it sad, a bit tragic even. I remember him winning in 1997 and just feeling this was such a fantastic moment. And it was, and that Government did a hell of a lot of good, things were so much better then, but I just wish he hadn't done Iraq, I really do."

An atheist raised as a Catholic, he adds for good measure: "He's also got all that religious crap going on, hasn't he? That doesn't help."

As for Labour today, he is baffled at the nature of the debate about who should succeed Jeremy Corbyn. The whole Corbyn project, he says, was clearly a failure, and yet the contenders do not appear to want to say so. "If Rebecca Long-Bailey takes over, it means they have learned nothing," he says. "But I

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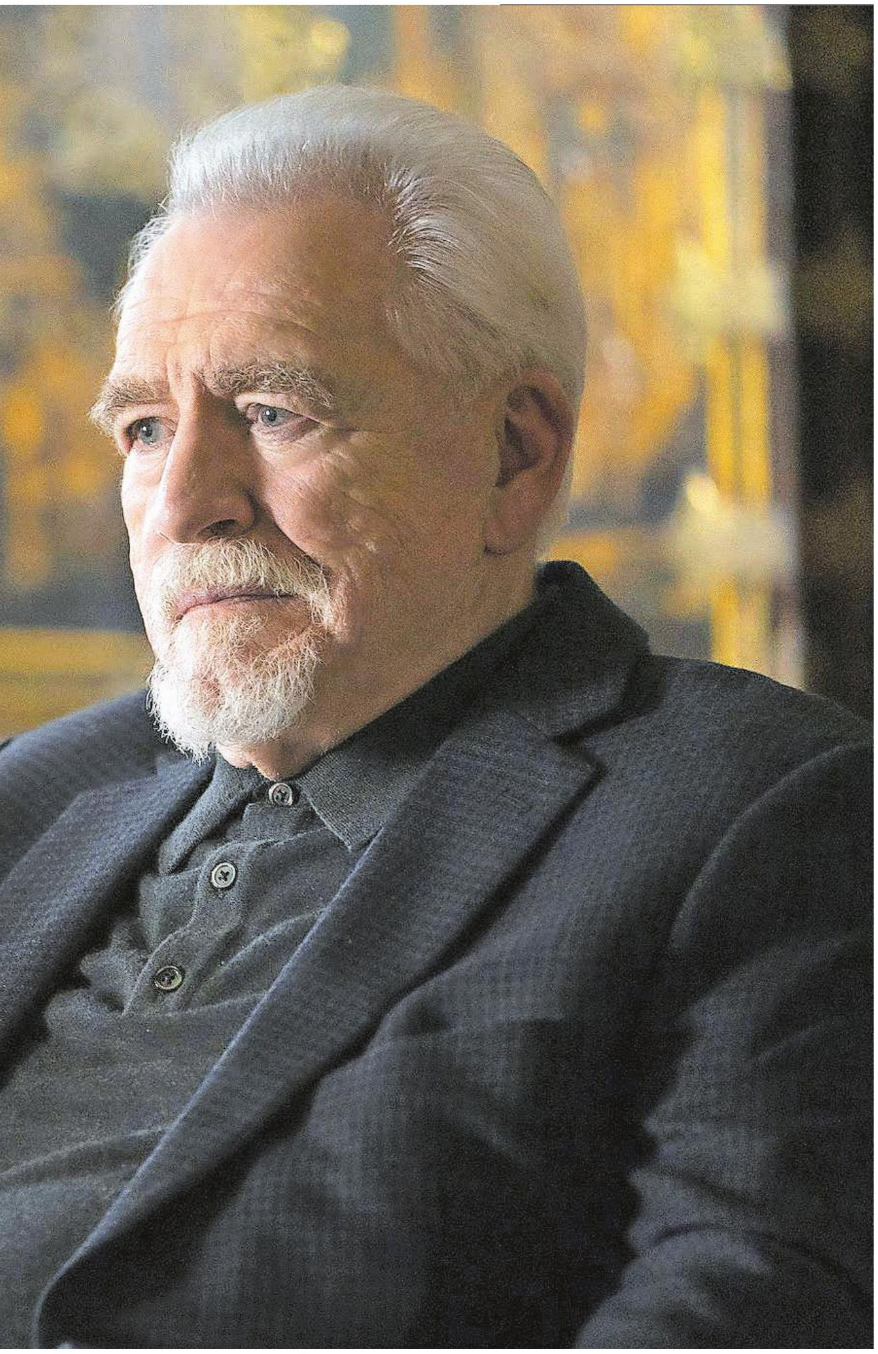
FORTHRIGHT:
1 Brian Cox as Logan Roy in *Succession*
Photo: HBO

2 The actor with Alastair and Grace Campbell
Photo: Twitter



would prefer a woman. I don't like Keir Starmer. Too much a lawyer. I much prefer Lisa Nandy. She seems to me to get it more."

The other wrinkle is Scottish independence, though here too we find ourselves closer than perhaps once we might have been. At the 2014 independence referendum I really struggled to see why Scots would want to go it alone. Brexit, to such a large extent the product of English nationalism, and Johnson as PM with a majority dependent entirely on England, changes the equation somewhat. Also, Cox insists that despite wanting independence he does not see himself as a nationalist. Indeed he tells us he wishes the SNP would change its name to the Scottish Independence Party. "I am an internationalist. I think wanting Scotland to be an independent country in Europe is compatible with that. The whole damned Brexit thing has been about English nationalism. If I felt Scotland could be an independent country in Europe, that would be my ideal now. The idea that this Government has the faintest clue or interest in Scotland – forget it."

He goes further, describing the attitudes of Old Etonian Johnson and his like as "feudalism… this is the whole problem with Britain. It is f**king feudal. "Know your place. Don't step out of line. You belong THERE!" These f**kers are so f**king entitled. The people are just pawns for them. And it has been like this forever. You just get the odd period, like we had with you guys, when it feels different for a while, but then they come back. It is so depressing. That's why Scotland has to go it alone. We get held back by it again and again."

■ Listen to Alastair and Grace Campbell's podcast, *Football, Feminism and Everything In Between*, on all usual platforms

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Mandrake

Tim Walker

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Now Crick has Farage in his sights

Quite possibly because he gets along so famously with media tycoons such as **Sir David** and **Sir Frederick Barclay** and **Rupert Murdoch**, **Nigel Farage** hasn't until now been troubled unduly by investigative journalists inquiring into his colourful life.

Mandrake hears that's about to change as **Michael Crick**, *pictured*, starts work on a no-holds-barred biography that will follow his books on **Lords Archer** and **Heseltine** and **Sir Alex Ferguson**, the former Manchester United boss.

During his days at *Channel 4 News*, Crick had periodic run-ins with Farage, most notably asking him if he had ever marched through a Sussex village as a schoolboy singing Hitler Youth songs. Farage had denied that he even knew the words to them.

It was, however, Crick's colleague **Matt Frei** who probably asked him the most awkward question when he inquired early last year who had paid for a private jet to take him from London and Strasbourg. The then MEP initially claimed he'd paid for it himself, but subsequently asserted an unidentified businessman had come forward to reimburse him for the trip in full.

Crick would do well to look into that matter, and to speak, too, to Farage's former mistress, **Annabelle Fuller**, who told me she now regarded him as an "infantile w*****."

There was, incidentally, much speculation about why Crick suddenly and unexpectedly left *Channel 4 News* last year, but the journalist insisted at the time that he was "looking forward to an exciting new life writing books again". He has since joined the *Daily Mail* online outfit, *Mail Plus*.

Sweet FA

How extraordinary that **Michael Gove** – who assured us all not so long ago that he would be "working literally flat-out" to prepare the country for a no-deal Brexit – has managed to find the time to indulge his new-found passion for football.

The chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has just admitted in the register of members' interests that he saw Manchester City play at home in November with an unidentified acquaintance.

Needless to say, the millionaire journalist-turned-politician didn't pay for the tickets and hospitality himself – retailing at £1,440 – which were picked up for reasons best known to its top brass by the club itself. The busy bee had earlier accepted three other tickets from the Football Association at a more modest £660.

Radio Ga Ga

When **Martin Ivens** was ousted as the editor of the *Sunday Times*, much was made in the official press release from the company of his skills as a broadcaster. This struck colleagues as somewhat eccentric as Ivens' periodic television and radio appearances scarcely put him up there in the pantheon of all-time greats, alongside with **Richard Dimbleby** and **Robin Day**.

As ever with the Murdoch empire, there was method in the madness. I hear that Ivens may soon be taking up a senior role in Times Radio, which aims to challenge the supremacy of Radio 4 when it launches in the spring.

Although there's been talk of "opinion-led" programming, even Murdoch recognises that a product quite as unsubtle in its political affiliations as Fox News would not win over the chattering classes on this side of the pond. Murdoch's occasional lunching partner **Sarah Sands** might take a role at Times Radio after she's served out her notice on the ailing *Today* programme.

Division bell

As allegations of bullying continue to be levelled against **John Bercow**, a number of old friends in parliament and beyond gave him a vote of confidence by showing up at the Southbank Kitchen in Camberwell, south London, for the party to launch his autobiography, *Unspeakable*.

Ed Miliband, the former Labour leader, was among those who attended, in addition to **Ed Balls**, **Lord Hain**, and, for the Tories, the soon-to-be-ennobled **Ken Clarke**. **Gina Miller**, *pictured*, also put in an appearance.

Over the weekend, Bercow said he believed there was a "conspiracy" to deny him the peerage that's normally bestowed as a matter of course upon speakers when they relinquish office. He named no names, but said it was "blindingly obvious" that there was a "concerted campaign" to prevent him from entering the Upper House.

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The MP, the convict and a question of character

Steve Anglesey

In the final week of January, the Brexiteer MP Andrea Jenkyns told the *Yorkshire Post*'s political podcast *Pod's Own Country* about the abuse she had suffered over the last few years. "At the height of it I got death threats," she said. "I got people writing on my office wall telling me to kill myself… we had someone in July who phoned the office threatening to 'rip the bitch's face off'."

On another occasion, which Jenkyns spoke about late last year, a man with a sledgehammer confronted one of her team while they were out canvassing. "When I found out what happened, I was in tears," she said.

This is awful, horrible stuff. You hate to imagine another Remainer doing it. You hate to imagine another human doing it. You hate to imagine anyone being on the receiving end. All of which makes what happened next all the more difficult to fathom.

In the first week of February, a Conservative pro-Brexit campaigner named Joshua Spencer was jailed for nine weeks after admitting to sending a message in April 2019 in which he called MP Yvette Cooper a "whore" and added, "She will pay. I'm already organising to hurt her. Amazing what crackheads will do for £100. I'm going to get her beat up."

Impact statements from Cooper and her former office manager Jade Botterill were read at Spencer's trial. Cooper's spoke about how Spencer has continued to email her office even after his arrest (he lives in her Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford constituency) and organised a "hostile" demo outside it last summer. He'd even attended her election count in December as a representative of the Tories. Spencer's actions, said Botterill, left her "constantly on edge" and led to her leaving a job she'd done for seven years.

Andrea Jenkyns, who beat Cooper's husband Ed Balls in 2015 to win her Morley and Outwood seat, also gave a statement to the court. Hers was a character reference for Spencer, whom she described as "a decent and honest person… whose heart is in the right place and who always helps people in need".

Jenkyns said that while she did not "condone what he wrote in any manner", Spencer had suffered "an incredibly difficult life so far".

Not surprisingly, this has left Botterill baffled. "I don't really understand why she would do that," she told *The New European*. "She must know what it's like to receive abuse and threats. Unfortunately most MPs do. And it's particularly worse for female MPs in West Yorkshire." The name of Jo Cox is unspoken but Morley is a five-minute train ride from Batley, which Cox represented.

Jenkyns later issued a statement standing by her decision. "I have known Joshua for a number of years," she wrote. "Josh has bipolar and had mental health issues since his father's suicide in 2015 and I was and remain concerned about his mental well-being and wanted to make sure it was taken into consideration as part of the judicial process."

The thought is commendable, but some things don't quite stack up. For a start, there is dispute over exactly how long Jenkyns has known Spencer, who acted as a UKIP agent in the 2017 general election and only joined the Conservatives after that.

There is the question of how comfortably Jenkyns' concern for an acquaintance's well-being sits next to cuts in mental health funding under Conservative governments; last year 92% of NHS mental health trust leaders in England said they believed benefit changes under the Tories have increased the number of people with anxiety and depression.

And how does Jenkyns marry her plea for clemency on behalf of a Conservative campaigner with her demand for tougher justice for others? In December 2018 she tabled an early day motion calling for more stringent sentencing, noting that "keeping perpetrators of violent crime off the street will send the right message to people that might engage in such acts, help keep the public safe and deter further violent offences". Would she have intervened on behalf of someone with mental health issues who did not happen to share her political views? If so, how many times has she done this recently?

We asked Jenkyns' constituency office some of these questions – and others, including how Spencer managed to be among the 400 attendees of the "Big Brexit Bash" party she organised on January 31 – but they are yet to respond.

In the Commons on Monday, Cooper expressed disappointment that "the neighbouring MP chose to give a very positive character reference for this individual without contacting me first. And I have raised that with her directly".

THE BIG BREXIT BASH!
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CHARACTER REFERENCE: Conservative MP Andrea Jenkyns at her 'Big Brexit Bash' party in Morley on January 31 Photo: Getty Images

Jenkyns has issued a further statement expressing "solidarity to Yvette, her staff & all my colleagues who, like me, have been threatened". But, says Botterrill, "Andrea hasn't reached out to me. I don't know if she has reached out to Yvette. It's still pretty upsetting she hasn't condemned his actions.

"We need everyone in politics to demonstrate that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable not be giving them character references knowing they've supported violence to someone just for doing their job."

In her podcast interview, Jenkyns said she felt sad that, post-Brexit, there were "colleagues in the tea room who won't sit next to me". Her actions in the case of Joshua Spencer surely won't help that change any time soon.

STEVE'S SELECTION

LEMBIT OPIK and HENRY BOLTON

"To read the perspective of a senior figure in British politics at such a volatile time has given me the chance to test my own perspective versus that of another person who's thought extensively."

Does this oddly-constructed sentence come from a heavyweight Brexiteer's review of the John Bercow autobiography, or a former cabinet minister weighing in on David Cameron's as it hits paperback? No, it's the bloke who went out with a Cheeky Girl in the foreword for a newish book by the bloke who goes out with a woman who was racist about Meghan Markle. "A senior figure in British politics" indeed!

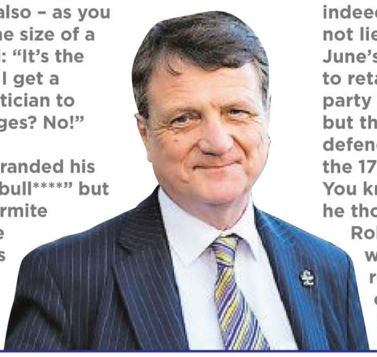
Bolton's *What A State* features quotes from Sophocles, Shakespeare and Einstein but nothing as good as his partner Jo Marney's explanation for claiming she felt like Anne Frank ("I didn't mean I was a Jewish girl that was going to be captured by the Nazis. I just couldn't go outside, or near windows").

PETER DAWE

The internet pioneer, entrepreneur and failed Brexit Party candidate unveiled his latest invention – a £100 "sleep pod" for the homeless, made from two wheelie bins joined together.

Dawe polled 1,041 votes in Cambridge at the last election despite billing himself as a "superhero". He has also recently invented the "solar pod", a 20mph electric vehicle which is also – as you might have guessed – "the size of a wheelie bin". He moaned: "It's the perfect solution, but can I get a single establishment politician to recognise those advantages? No!" Wonder why?

A homeless charity has branded his latest wheeze "a load of bull****" but Dawe insisted: "It is a Marmite design." How long before he suggests the homeless should kip in a giant jar of Marmite which converts into a car?



BLAME GAME: Former UKIP leader Gerard Batten Photo: Getty Images

GERARD BATTEN

Prepare the world's smallest violin! UKIP's suspiciously-coiffed former leader has Tweeted: "Very sad news. UKIP is now on the brink of insolvency. This has happened because of the NEC driving away members & revenue… If UKIP dies it will be because of the NEC."

Just a thought, but should some – indeed the lion's share – of the blame not lie with the leader who at last June's Europeans elections managed to retain none of the 24 MEPs the party won in 2014? And who lost all but three of the 126 council seats they defended in 2018 before losing 145 of the 176 they defended a year later? You know, the one who was so bad he thought cuddling up to Tommy Robinson was a vote-winner? Who was such a disaster that he was replaced by someone actually called Dick Braine? Now, who was that again?

NIGEL FARAGE

The nicotine-stained man-frog plumbed new depths while on a visit to a private evangelical university in America by suggesting that divine intervention might have spared him from his 2010 plane crash in order to deliver Brexit.

Farage accepted an honorary doctorate from LGBT+-unfriendly Liberty University, whose "honour code" for students bans "sexual relations outside of a Biblically ordained marriage between a natural-born man and natural-born woman".

He told an interviewer: "How on earth I survived I will never know." When the interviewer suggested it was "God's providence and protection", Farage replied: "I'm alive and he (the pilot, who survived the crash, but died in 2013) is not and I did think after I survived that perhaps, just perhaps, I was put here for a purpose."

Does this mean that the biggest Brexiteer of them all is God?

EXPERTISE

NEW FRONTIER OF CONFLICT: The development of drone swarms is changing the face of warfare
Photo: Getty Images

THE COMING SWARM

Cheap, easy to use and deadly, autonomous weapons have been called the "Kalashnikovs of tomorrow". **FRED HARTER** and **GILES WHITTELL** chart their terrifying rise

On an overcast day last June, a group of drones took to the sky above Fort Benning, a sprawling US army base in southern Georgia. Each machine was identical to the next, and measured about a foot across. They hovered for a while above the Tarmac before buzzing through the streets of a mock-up town towards their objective: City Hall. When they arrived, they surrounded the building, waiting until they were all in position. Then they flew inside and hunted down their target. The exercise lasted around 30 minutes, using off-the-shelf drones worth just a few hundred dollars each.

A few months later, a different sort of drone – an MQ-9 Reaper; $16 million, wingspan 20 metres – tracked and killed General Qassem Soleimani of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, thought to be the second-most powerful man in Iran, as he drove into Baghdad from the airport in an armoured motorcade. His SUV was incinerated almost instantly, his identity confirmed by his disembodied hand.

The Reaper attack was, in a sense, after its time. It destroyed a target followed by the CIA for years, using technology perfected by the Pentagon in 2007. And behind the strike was a pilot of sorts – a uniformed US air force specialist with a joystick and a screen in a softly-lit operations room north of Las Vegas.

The Fort Benning exercise was directed by a lighter human touch. At its helm was a person with a laptop, but his role was to assign the drones objectives and leave the machines to sort out the rest. The swarm took off on human orders but manoeuvred and attacked without direction, hesitation or remorse.

If the Reaper was contemporary warfare, the swarm was the near future.

This is a future for which three American presidents – and one in particular – laid the groundwork, with a campaign of drone strikes from Pakistan to Africa that has killed perhaps 10,000 avowed enemies of the US but created many more. It's a future in which, for the first time in the history of conflict, soldiers will be able to outsource to algorithms and artificial intelligence split-second decisions on when, whom and whether to kill.

"This is not science fiction," Stuart Russell, a computer scientist at the University of California at Berkeley, told us. "No significant advances in AI are needed." Swarms, like the one at Fort Benning, will soon be able to hunt for and eliminate humans in towns and inside buildings, and they "would be cheap, effective, unattributable and easily proliferated once major powers initiate mass production".

Autonomous weapons are the military equivalent of driverless cars dispatched to pick up pizza by whatever route they like. Their ability to improvise and communicate with each other gives them the appearance of agency. It makes them terrifying. They are the coming thing, but they are also an evolution of the arm's length violence that critics say has been lowering commanders' psychological threshold for the use of force for 20 years.

Unlike chemical and biological weapons, autonomous armed drones have not been outlawed. UN working groups have tried to start regulating their development, and failed: few know much for certain about their capabilities, and those who know most are usually the least likely to share their expertise. These people are mostly software engineers.

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From page 21

AUTONOMOUS ARMS RACE: **1** Sea Hunter, an unmanned anti-submarine vessel, was launched by the US Navy in 2016

Photo: John F. Williams

They work in government and the private sector in the US, the UK, Israel and, crucially, in China, whose AI labs are closely controlled by the state. On this new frontier of conflict, the first casualty has been transparency. Accountability looks certain to be the next.

How did we get here? To understand the near future it helps to return to the near past, and to the industrialisation of drone usage as the "war on terror" gathered pace. The Pentagon first looked seriously at arming drones after al-Qaeda's bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000. Within a decade, drones were the speartip of the US military – not yet as bringers of AI-driven autonomy, but certainly as bringers of death.

Faheem Qureishi heard a sound like a plane taking off near his family's home in North Waziristan on January 23, 2009. In fact it was a drone passing overhead, the first ever dispatched by president Barack Obama. It sent a missile through the roof of the room where Qureishi was standing. He staggered out, gravely injured; two of his uncles and a cousin were killed.

The Obama administration never admitted mistaking Qureishi's family for militants, and nor did it apologise. It did admit killing 3,797 people in 542 drone strikes between January 2009 and January 2017, of whom it said 116 were civilians. (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which has been tracking drone warfare for years, says the civilian death toll was at least six times that.)

Obama ramped up drone strike numbers ten-fold compared with George W Bush's second term. His rationale was to cut back troop deployments and limit civilian casualties. US drones, his staff said, were "exceptionally surgical and precise".

Sometimes, this has been true. But overall they have proved a blunt instrument. For 2014 alone, excluding operations in major war zones, the human rights watchdog Reprieve counted 1,147 fatalities in American attempts to kill 41 alleged militants with drones.

"Turns out I'm really good at killing people," Obama was quoted as saying in the book *Double Down*, a chronicle of the 2012 presidential race. "Didn't know that was going to be a strong suit of mine."

He was more confident as a lawyer, and offered carefully worded justifications for drone strikes. They rested on 2001 legislation that expanded US presidents' authority to use force without consulting Congress, and on highly elastic interpretations of the phrase "imminent threat". Troops were at last coming home from Afghanistan, and the American public went along with it. Obama seemed to have normalised drone strikes in moral terms, while his top brass normalised them as a technology and his lawyers provided 41 pages of precedent and legal argument. And the broad freedom he asserted to use drones he has bequeathed to his successor, Donald Trump.

Trump has used drone strikes against Isis and in Somalia and Yemen with more gusto than Obama used them in Pakistan and Afghanistan – and with less transparency. In his first two years in office he authorised more than 240 strikes, compared with 186 launched by Obama in 2009 and 2010, and last year he rescinded an executive order signed by Obama that required the CIA to publish an annual total of civilian drone strike casualties in non-combat zones.

What might Trump do with a new generation of autonomous drones in a second term, with no fear of censure by voters or sanction by other arms of the US government? There is no way of knowing. Nor are there any internationally agreed rules to stay his hand, or anyone else's. America is not the only contender in the AI-driven arms race – Israel, Pakistan, Turkey, Russia and the UK are in it too…

* * *

The Fort Benning swarm experiment was conducted by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), otherwise known as the Pentagon's "Department for Mad Science". Each drone had been bought online and modified so they could zip around and find things without direct human control. The purpose was to see whether autonomous robots, working as a team, were capable of taking out targets in a built-up area.

They were.

Timothy Chung, the scientist in charge, envisions swarms of more than 250 drones that can assault and clear whole city blocks on their own. In this case the drones used were unarmed but they could be fitted with a few grammes of explosive each, enough to punch a hole through metal or penetrate a human skull. Cheap, easy to use and readily available, autonomous weapons like these have been called "the Kalashnikovs of tomorrow". Indeed, Russian military drones are already being built by the maker of the AK-47.

Researchers and activists are worried. "About five years ago, I began noticing that the types of AI technologies that I had spent my life developing were being turned into proto-type weapons," says Toby Walsh, a professor at the University of New South Wales and one of Australia's foremost AI experts. "I felt I had an obligation to speak out."

Proliferation – the scale and spread of the technology – is his main concern. "In the history of military affairs, no military has kept a weapon to itself for a significant amount of time," he says, pointing to the example of the hydrogen bomb, which Russia got with the help of spies in the US. But Walsh believes that

TIMELINE: RISE OF THE ROBOTS

SEPTEMBER 7, 2000

The first unarmed remotely piloted aircraft, the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator, crosses into Afghanistan. A few weeks later, the drone's pilot, Scott Swanson, spots Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leader targeted by the CIA who had masterminded the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. But the US Predator drone is still unarmed, and Bin Laden remains unharmed.

OCTOBER 12, 2000

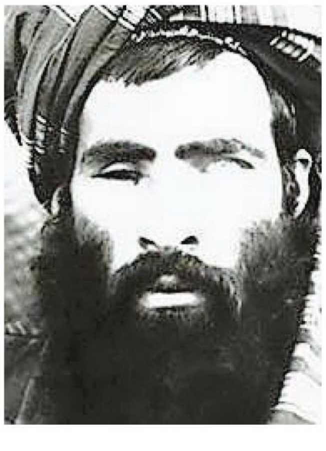
A fibreglass boat carrying explosives and suicide bombers approaches USS Cole as it is being refuelled in Yemen's Aden harbour. The boat explodes and kills 17 US sailors. al-Qaeda claims responsibility for the attack.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Two passenger planes are flown into the World Trade Center towers in New York. A few days after the attack, the US Congress passes the "Authorization for Use of Military Force" law, which is used by subsequent administrations as congressional authority for military operations, including drone strikes.

OCTOBER 7, 2001

America's first military drone strike ends in failure. In Afghanistan, the CIA fires a Hellfire missile from a Predator drone too early, missing the facility of Taliban commander Mullah Omar and hitting an empty truck. Omar escapes and survives for over a decade, dying of tuberculosis in 2013.



NOVEMBER 3, 2002

In Sanaa, Yemen, an RQ-1 Predator drone kills al-Qaeda operative Abu Ali al-Harithi, thought to be involved in the USS Cole attack. He is killed along with Kamal Derwish, a US citizen, whose death is the first known case of the US government killing a US citizen during the war on terror.

autonomous weapons are much more troubling than nuclear ones.

"To build nuclear weapons you need some pretty serious infrastructure, which makes them relatively easy to regulate," he says. By contrast, it doesn't take much to fit a recreational drone with a bit of plastic explosive and some facial recognition software. "Previously you needed lots of resources to build an army. With robots, you don't."

Any weapons improvised like this would be extraordinarily unreliable. For one thing, object identification software can be easily tricked. In November 2018, a team of researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology showed that even the best algorithms can be fooled into thinking a 3-D printed model of a turtle is a rifle – or any other object.

But a high risk of error won't bother some prospective users, least of all terrorists seeking to cause mass casualties. Islamic State and Yemen's Houthi rebels are already experimenting with standard commercial drones armed with grenades and small warheads, and even comparatively crude weapons can cause huge disruption. A case in point was the attack last September on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure, when a combination of missiles and kamikaze drones temporarily wiped out half the kingdom's output.

Ulrike Franke, a military technology expert at the European Council Foreign Relations, agrees that weaponising drones is easy. "The question is not whether to weaponise them," she says – that's inevitable. "The question is how much autonomy to give them."

★★★★★★★★★★

The idea of killer robots that think for themselves isn't new – think *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) – and some countries have given themselves a head-start in turning them into reality:

RISE OF THE ROBOTS:
2 The Phalanx gun has been used on US warships since the 1980s

3 Israel developed the Harpy suicide drone

4 The Taranis unmanned combat aircraft system was launched by BAE in 2013

Photos: Wikipedia

- The Phalanx gun has been standard equipment on US navy ships since the 1980s. Once switched on, it can shoot down missiles heading towards it without any human intervention, determining whether an object constitutes a threat by assessing its speed and trajectory with radar.
- The robotic sentry guns introduced by South Korea from 2006 to guard the demilitarised zone with North Korea, and by Israel to police its border with Gaza, work in a similar way – they use heat and motion sensors to pick up targets by themselves. Like the Phalanx, both are usually linked to a human operator who decides whether to fire. But they are designed to function with complete independence. South Korea's version even has a built-in speech system that can warn and interrogate targets on its own.
- For around 20 years Israel has also been making the "Harpy", a suicide drone equipped with a 16-kilogram warhead that loiters above battlefields. It can destroy air-defence systems by locking onto their radar signatures and smashing itself into them. China has bought several, as have Azerbaijan and India. And even as far back as the Second World War, German submarines were armed with acoustic torpedoes that homed in on targets using sonar.
- Russia is leading efforts to develop robotic tanks, although exactly how autonomous they are is not clear. Its military claims that its Platform-M system – a miniature tank kitted out with a machine gun and rocket launchers – "can destroy targets in automatic or semi-automatic control", suggesting it has at some freedom over what it attacks. Similar capabilities are reputed for Russia's Wolf-2 robot – the size of a small car – and the Vikhr, which is the size of an actual tank.
- China, which aims to be the world's leading AI power by 2030, sees swarms of cheap, expendable drones as a cost-effective way of negating superior American firepower in the Pacific. One Chinese firm, Oceanalpha, has posted footage of a fleet of 56 surface drones performing an elaborate nautical parade. Thousands of them could harass a carrier group, grounding its aircraft, or overwhelm a multi-billion-dollar air defence system designed to counter smaller numbers of conventional aircraft. Betting on their military potential, both countries are rushing to produce bigger and better drone swarms, in what military technology expert Paul Scharre has previously described as "some sort of weird swarm race"; soon after the US released a swarm of 103 drones from the back of a fighter jet in October 2016 – at that point the largest ever – China let loose a swarm of 119.

"In a very basic form, autonomy is already here," says Vincent Boulanin, a researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). He has counted 49 weapons systems currently in use that can detect and attack targets without human control.

Alongside autonomous drone swarms and missiles that can switch targets mid-flight, DARPA's current projects include the "Sea Hunter" – a crewless 132-foot ship designed to prowl oceans for weeks at a time, looking for enemy submarines and clearing mines. As with many autonomous systems, the main appeal is its cost: $21m each versus $1.6 billion for the latest destroyer, and only $20,000 a day to run against the daily $700,000 it costs to deploy a fully manned vessel doing the same – often tedious – job. The ship made its maiden voyage in February 2019, sailing itself 1,500 nautical miles from California to Hawaii.

DARPA has high hopes for robots like these. In an email Jared Adams, the

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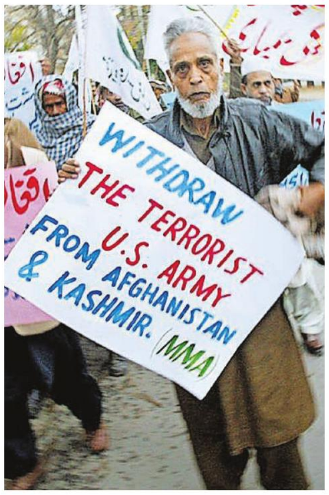
JANUARY 13, 2006

Four US Predator drones attack the Pakistani village of Damodola, targeting Ayman al-Zawahiri, second in command of al-Qaeda; the strikes kill 18 local villagers, including five children. Pakistan erupts into anti-US protests.



JANUARY 20, 2009

Barack Obama is inaugurated into office. Over his two terms he authorises more than 563 strikes, mostly by drones, almost 10 times the 57 strikes authorised under the Bush administration.

DECEMBER 10, 2009

Obama accepts the Nobel Peace Prize.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2011

An AGM-114 Hellfire missile fired by a Predator drone kills Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen believed to be centrally involved in al-Qaeda. Two weeks later, a separate Predator drone strike kills al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son and several other Yemeni civilians eating at an outdoor restaurant.

MAY 23, 2013

Obama gives a speech at the National Defense University, declaring that "America is at a crossroads" and limiting his drone policy by constraining targets to those who pose "a continuing, imminent threat to Americans".

JUNE 29, 2014

Three weeks after taking the city of Mosul in Iraq, Isis, which emerged out of an al-Qaeda affiliate, announces itself as a global Islamist caliphate, renaming itself the Islamic State and claiming authority over Muslims worldwide.

AUGUST 8, 2014

The US begins airstrikes, including drone attacks, on IS targets in Iraq before expanding operations into Syria the following month. In November, the UK uses an RAF Reaper drone to carry out its first drone strike on IS militants.

JANUARY 15, 2015

A US drone strike targeting an al-Qaeda compound on the porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where counterterrorism efforts are reliant on drone strikes, accidentally kills two innocent hostages, the American Warren Weinstein, and the Italian Giovanni Lo Porto.

EXPERTISE

From page 23

agency's communications chief, outlined the agency's ambitions. "DARPA envisions a future in which machines are more than just tools that execute human-programmed rules," he says. That is how existing autonomous systems such as the Phalanx gun or Israel's Harpy drone work, by performing a single task according to a narrow set of instructions. Instead, says Adams, "the machines DARPA envisions will function more as colleagues than as tools".

This scenario may not be far off. Imagine a squadron of Sea Hunters guarding a fleet of manned ships in a stand-off between the US and China in the western Pacific. Or a dozen pilotless planes flying alongside a normal fighter jet, giving a single pilot the firepower of several aircraft. Autonomous drone swarms, like the one tested at Fort Benning, could let troops battling their way though dusty streets know what's around the next corner or even spirit the wounded off the battlefield. In the words of one DARPA manager, they could also take out targets, "just as wolves hunt in coordinated packs".

The magic ingredient that has enabled DARPA to make the leap from the Phalanx gun to autonomous robotic wolf packs is machine learning – a computer's ability, thanks to AI, to spot patterns in data and teach itself to recognise and act on them. In principle this can help humans make better decisions too. DARPA has software that tries to predict the movements of hostile forces up to five hours in advance. The US National Security Agency has a programme called Skynet that flags potential couriers for terror groups by trawling through Pakistani mobile phone data and picking out suspicious patterns, such as individuals who travel frequently to the Afghan frontier or who regularly take the SIM cards out of their phones. Places they visit might be solid targets for drone strikes. Owing to employee protests, Google has withdrawn from a similar programme – Project Maven – that uses machine-learning to help analysts spot targets in thousands of hours of footage shot by drones.

* * *

But picking the wrong target can be catastrophic, and it happens a lot. Some would say it's been the leitmotif of drone warfare from the start.

Late on October 7, 2001, 26 days after the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11, a vengeful US military was poised to strike al-Qaeda in Afghanistan from every angle, starting from above. In a detailed reconstruction for *The Atlantic* years later, the journalist Chris Woods showed how confusion and error defined the outbreak of hostilities.

The Pentagon's Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Saudi Arabia had planned to deliver an opening salvo with F-16 fighter jets armed with 1,000lb bombs. The planes were in the air, close to their targets, which included a compound in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar to which the CIA had traced Mullah Omar, Al Qaeda's second-in-command.

It was dark, but CAOC had the compound under surveillance with a Predator drone flying overhead and relaying live images to US commanders on an air base outside Riyadh. The ranking officers there were Air Force General Chuck Wald and his deputy, Dave Deptula. Minutes before clearing the F-16s to attack, they saw a puff of smoke on their screens as a Hellfire missile from the Predator destroyed a row of vehicles parked outside the compound.

"We both watched the weapon impact," Deptula told journalist Woods, "and both turned to each other and said, 'who the f**k did that?'"

In that case the answer was a person – a CIA team, in fact, that had decided to pre-empt old-fashioned aircraft and try to take out Osama bin Laden's number two remotely. They failed; Omar was still inside the compound.

Others have not been so lucky. Makbhout Adhban, an investigator working for Reprieve who has analysed hundreds of drone strikes in Yemen, said no strike feels precise from the ground. "It was not the experience of people on the ground and certainly not my experience." The effect on communities across the country has been stark – the shadowy threat of attack from the sky is generating "a constant sense of fear", Adhban says, especially in children. "There is a fear of planes, in general, and any sound of anything in the sky. The communities are usually afraid of loud sounds and [if they hear them] they'll run away and try to hide. I've also witnessed many children with sleep deprivation."

* * *

Autonomy *might* sharpen target selection, but it will also inevitably shift the balance between human and synthetic judgment. People will die, and no one will be able to say with confidence who killed them.

Western governments and their militaries are cagey when it comes to how much autonomy they are willing to give weapons. Especially since it is not clear whether they could be programmed to follow international laws requiring armed forces to distinguish between combatants and civilians, as well as surrendered adversaries and active ones. So when we sent the UK's Ministry of Defence a list of questions about Britain's activities in this area, it wasn't a surprise to receive a one-line response: "The United Kingdom does not possess fully autonomous weapon systems and has no intention of developing them."

The key word here is "fully". Strategists insist that humans will always remain in the frame in some way. After all, military doctrine has long emphasised the importance of command and control on the battlefield. The last thing generals want is to set loose a bunch of rampaging killer robots that are free to do their worst.

In the US, the working assumption is that drone autonomy in war zones will be in the service of soldiers and pilots, not the other way round. As an example, Dan Gettinger of the Center for the Study of the Drone speaks of "manned-unmanned" teamings of a human pilot with a squadron of fixed-wing drones acting as extra eyes, ears – and weapons platforms.

But the extent to which humans will remain in the frame is far from clear. Will an operator be required to authorise a strike every time a robot identifies a target? Or can that decision be left to the machine? Is it enough that there is an officer on a laptop, circling areas on a map and ordering his platoon of robots to attack everything that looks like a tank in "Area A" or everyone carrying guns in "Location B"? In neither scenario are the robots "fully" autonomous.

"I don't know if there will always be people making that final decision," Gettinger says. "It's policy now, but of course policies can change."

It's not hard to argue for autonomous targeting on practical grounds. When a hypersonic missile is hurtling towards you at 1.5 miles per second – too fast for a human to realise that a threat even exists – you probably want an ultra-fast machine that responds automatically. But what happens when a drone patrolling a street malfunctions, or mistakes a civilian's broom for a rifle? Is the officer who sent it on the mission to blame? Or is the coder back home?

Militaries prefer to leave the answers to these questions vague. "Humans will continue to have a role and exert some type of control over autonomous

TIMELINE: RISE OF THE ROBOTS

AUGUST 21, 2015

David Cameron becomes the first UK prime minister to direct an attack by an unmanned drone outside a formal conflict, after an RAF MQ-9 Reaper drone flown from a base in rural Lincolnshire kills Reyaad Khan, a 21-year-old from Cardiff suspected of fighting with the IS, and two other Isis fighters, including a second Briton.

NOVEMBER 12, 2015

In Raqqa, Syria, two US MQ-9 Reaper drones and a British MQ-9 drone kill Mohammed Emwazi, dubbed by the British and American press as "Jihadi John", a British man who appeared in several IS videos beheading foreign captives. US Army Colonel Steve Warren later says that the strike turned Emwazi into "a greasy spot in the ground".

APRIL 4, 2016

Azerbaijani forces attack a bus carrying Armenian volunteer soldiers and kill seven people in the first known use of the Israeli-made autonomous Harpy suicide drone in combat. It is believed that the Harpy didn't make this attack in its fully autonomous mode.

JULY 1, 2016

Barack Obama issues an executive order requiring the head of the CIA to publish the number of civilians killed by drone strikes in non-combat zones, but the order is revoked three years later by Donald Trump, whose administration calls it "superfluous".

OCTOBER 2, 2016

IS carries out its first successful drone attack in combat, killing two Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and wounding two French Special Operations troops in Iraq. In January of the following year the Islamic State announces its inaugural drone unit, named "Unmanned Aircraft of the Mujahideen", thought to be a fleet of small, relatively inexpensive drones modified and equipped with bombs.

JANUARY 20, 2017

President Trump is inaugurated into office. He authorises 238 drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan in his first two years in power, more than the 186 authorised by Obama over the same period.

NOVEMBER 3, 2017

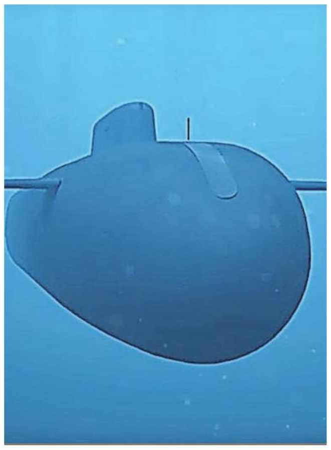
US drone strikes target IS fighters in Somalia for the first time, killing several militants.

JANUARY 5, 2018

In the first known case of a swarm drone attack, 13 homemade drones attack Russian forces at two bases in western Syria. According to the Russian Defence Ministry, the drones were sent by Turkish-backed Syrian rebels and operated autonomously.

MARCH 1, 2018

Vladimir Putin uses his annual state of the nation speech to announce a 100 megaton nuclear-powered underwater drone called Poseidon. Russia claims it can travel thousands of miles and create widespread and long-lasting nuclear contamination on impact.



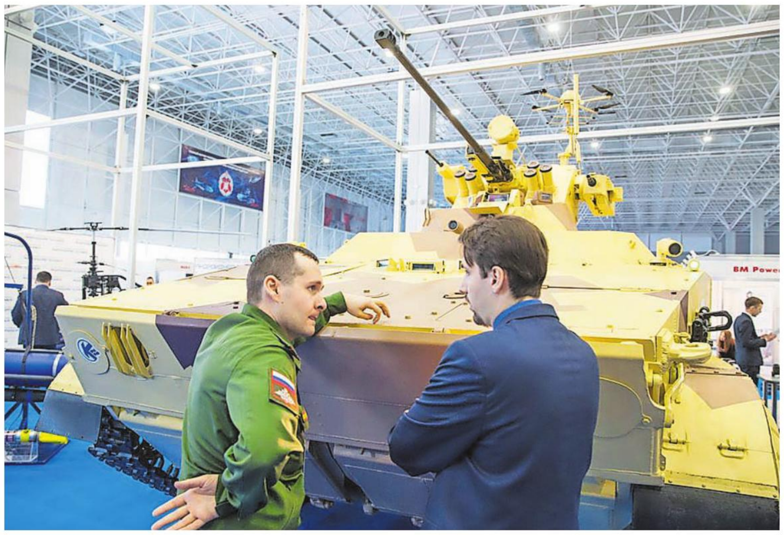
weapons," predicts Boulanin at SIPRI. "The key problem is how they will continue to exert that control, and whether it will remain meaningful and appropriate."

When we pointed out to the MoD's press office that Britain's armed forces held a well-publicised exercise on Salisbury Plain in December 2018 called "Autonomous Warrior", they provided more details about Britain's hopes for autonomy. These are mostly humdrum, focusing on the logistical and administrative aspects of armed conflict rather than questions of life or death. It's true that one of autonomy's main military appeals is the potential to automate tedious tasks, such as transport. It could also keep soldiers out of harm's way. Many of the robots tested on Salisbury Plain are designed to resupply troops bogged down in combat zones, an extremely dangerous job that's currently done by other humans.

But Britain is also building targeting and surveillance systems aided by algorithms. Perhaps the most expensive autonomous system developed by the UK so far is Taranis, a $185m unmanned stealth plane designed by BAE Systems, which can fly itself between continents, gather intelligence, pick out targets and potentially strike them – all without any human input. The MoD insists that the project is purely experimental and that the plane itself will never be deployed. But it also says that the technology developed under Taranis "will be at the core of any future combat air system".

* * *

People should not automatically fear AI, says Thomas Walsh. But we do need clear limits on its use. "Everything we work on can be used for good or bad," he says, pointing out that autonomous weapons use "pretty much the same algorithms that self-driving cars do for tracking pedestrians and avoiding them, but for tracking combatants and hitting them".


MILITARY MIGHT: Hardware for the Russian Vikhr robotic system on display at an exhibition in Moscow, 2017
Photo: Getty Images

The trouble is, efforts to agree an international treaty regulating autonomous weapons have stalled. Last August the latest round of talks at the United Nations lasted late into the night, finally breaking up at 3am with the parties still in disagreement over basic terms, such as the difference between "development" and "developing". Even the meaning of 'autonomy' is hotly contested. "The discussions are slow," says one UN official frustrated at the pace. But "the technological developments are not".

The Pentagon uses dozens of acronyms to cover its autonomous weapons R&D work. One of the most striking is CARACaS, for Control Architecture for Robotic Agent Command and Sensing. This is software based on code used in Nasa's Mars Rover, repurposed to turn standard speedboats into self-driving swarms that can "mob" unidentified ships, gather information on them and sink them if necessary. The system has been tested on a flotilla of pilotless inflatables in the James River in Virginia. You can see it on YouTube and for a drone swarm it looks docile, if a little eerie. But google "CARACaS drone" and by bizarre coincidence you're taken to something very different: footage of a miniature airborne drone exploding above Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro during a military parade two years ago.

The regime denied it, but it was an assassination attempt. It was primitive and it failed. Next time, with some pre-loaded autonomous targeting and facial recognition software, who knows?

* * *

The world's militaries, in uneasy combination with the software industry, are on a long sleep-walk towards a new age of killer drones; weapons that combine the defensive autonomy of sentry guns with the offensive autonomy of roaming pilotless aircraft – and the cheap availability of hobby drones. This mix is changing the face of war. It has raced ahead of formal military doctrine, and the law of war. The Horn of Africa and the entire Middle East live under the faint, fast-moving shadow of a (mainly) American-built drone force that can kill at any time without warning, accountability or any guarantee of hitting the right target.

What will it take to dial down the threat? Few major powers are keen to tie their hands when the full military potential of autonomy is not yet clear. Only 28 countries support a pre-emptive ban on autonomous weapons and almost all are minnows who stand to benefit little from them, such as Uganda, Costa Rica and the Holy See.

"We've had eight rounds of talks on killer robots now and every time they meet, they return to this notion of what constitutes human control," says Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, who coordinates the "Campaign to Stop Killer Robots". She is confident a deal will eventually be struck but worries that it might take the use of autonomous weapons in a real-life war to spur action, which is what happened before chemical weapons, nuclear weapons, landmines and cluster munitions were regulated. "The question is: will the treaty arrive in time or will it be too late?"

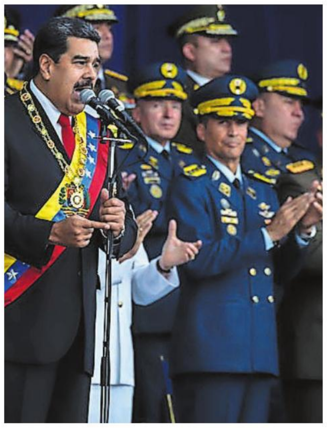
In this contest between hope and experience, experience wins – and wins ugly.

This story was first published by Tortoise, a different type of newsroom dedicated to a slower, wiser news. Try Tortoise for a month for free at www.tortoisemedia.com/activate/tne-guest and use the code TNEGUEST.

Tortoise

AUGUST 4, 2018

Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro survives an alleged assassination attempt when exploding drones detonate above him as he makes a speech in Caracas. Some suggest that the incident was a "false flag" operation devised by the government to allow suppression of opposition.



DECEMBER 2018

A global Ipsos MORI poll finds that 61% of adults across 26 countries oppose the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

JUNE 20, 2019

Tensions between US and Iran, already rising under the Trump administration, escalate after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard shoots down a US surveillance drone over the Strait of Hormuz.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

A drone strike by Houthi rebels on two Saudi Aramco oil facilities forces Saudi Arabia to shut down half of its oil production, about five per cent of oil production worldwide.

DECEMBER 21, 2019

France carries out its first ever drone strike, against militants in Mali. Seven militants are killed in the attack.

JANUARY 3, 2019

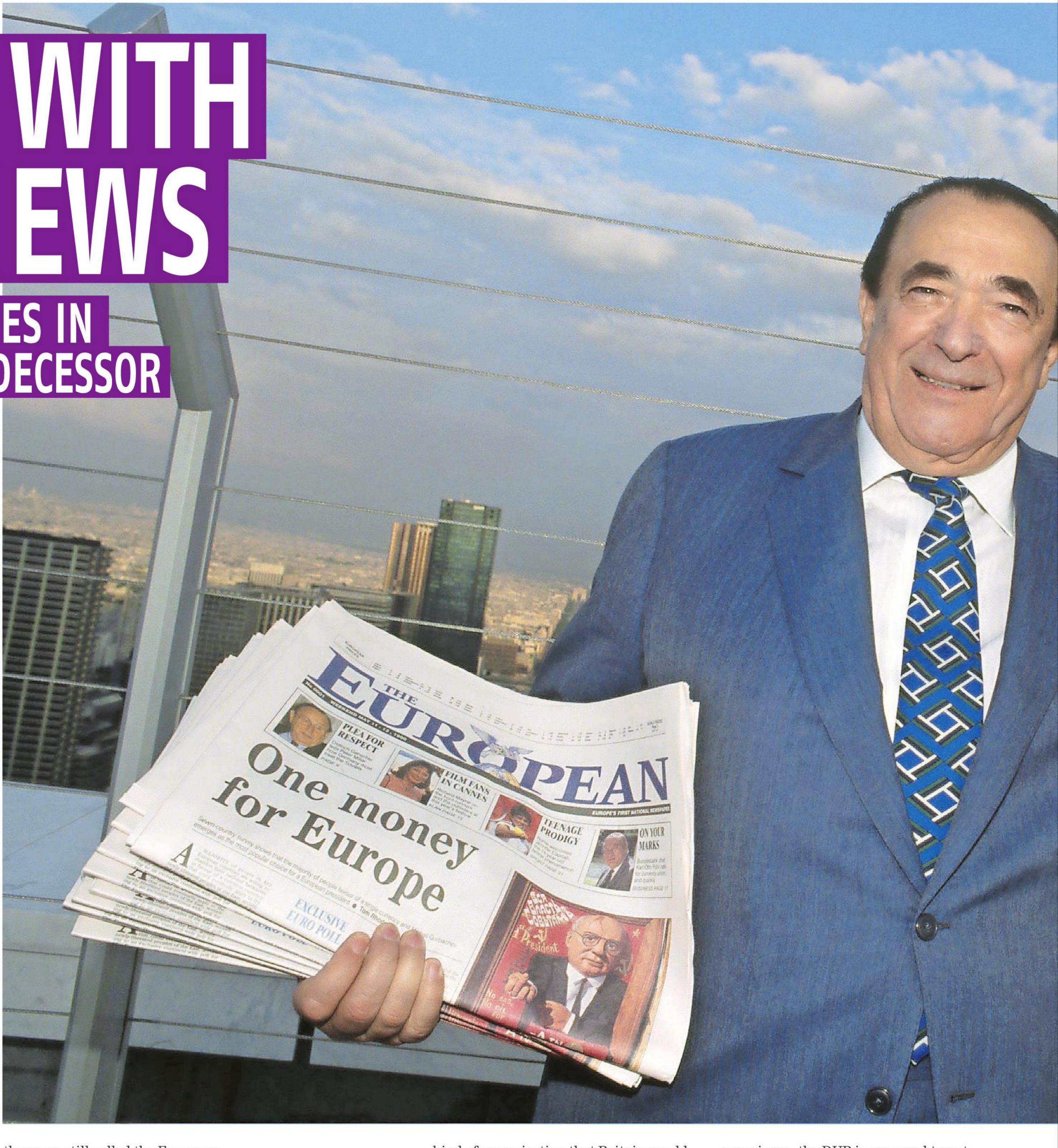
The US assassinates Qasem Soleimani, an Iranian commander in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, near Baghdad International Airport with an MQ-9 Reaper drone. It is the first time the US has used a drone to kill another country's senior commander on foreign soil.

TIMELINE BY XAVIER GREENWOOD

EXPERTISE

FIRST WITH THE NEWS

FAMILIAR STORIES IN OUR PRINT PREDECESSOR



The original *European* newspaper belonged to a different era. Yet flicking through its first edition, **MICK O'HARE** finds some familiar themes emerging

You can admit it. Many of you may have never stopped to wonder why this newspaper (presuming you are holding the print edition) had the word 'New' in its title, had you? And if you had, you probably thought it was something to do with progressive politics… maybe the hope that we'd all become pro-European anew once the horror of Brexit was revealed to an aghast population. Wishful thinking? Well, we've just found out a bit more about that haven't we?

But back to the title. The reason the "New" is there is far more prosaic. It's because there was once an "old" *European*.

Yes, in the heady days when the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of eastern European communism gave great fervour to hopes for pan-European unity in perpetuity, the *European* – which has no link to the present title – was launched on the back of this new-found optimism.

It was published by Robert Maxwell, wartime Czech exile, media proprietor, former MP, and he of the pilfered *Daily Mirror* pension fund, although at that time little was known about the forthcoming scandal which would emerge following his death.

Like the current paper, the *European* was also a weekly. The first edition was a broadsheet with 64 pages plus a culture supplement, published on May 11, 1990. Flicking through a copy of that issue now, you cannot fail to be struck by the ironies, paradoxes and parallels with today's publication.

For its launch, the *European* had commissioned a poll across the continent asking any number of questions regarding Britain's role in Europe. It was around the time that the former communist states of eastern Europe were casting their attention westwards and towards possible membership of what then was still called the European Community.

Were we more open-minded back then because a full two-thirds of Britons questioned wanted full integration of these nations into the EC? We were also keen on a single currency for the bloc. It's right there on the front page – honest!

Inside, are countless more stories pertinent to today's debate, and the current Brexit debacle we are now enduring, and all covered in a swathe of optimism that broadly accepted that the European Community was both a force for good on our continent and also the kind of organisation that Britain would be crazy to discard membership of. Polyglots abounded, and parts of the newspaper could almost be slipped into today's *New European* without anybody noticing.

There's a column from Michael Heseltine headlined "The vision of unity that must not fail" (you can't accuse the man of inconsistency, that's for sure) and a story about the founder of the Democratic Unionist Party, the late Ian Paisley, demanding that soon-to-be reunified Germany declare itself a Protestant state. As we know from recent experience, the DUP is prepared to put clout above perspective.

But what you won't find in the contemporary *European* title is a personal endorsement from the prime minister of the day. Perish the thought. But Margaret Thatcher, who is so frequently invoked by the Brexit-supporting press as a totem of everything they are striving for, penned a welcome message especially for the *European*'s first issue.

Here are a few choice sentences. "If ever an era in our history created an opportunity for the *European* newspaper,

THE EUROPEAN
EUROPE'S FIRST NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PLEA FOR RESPECT
FILM FANS IN CANNES
TEENAGE PRODIGY
ON YOUR MARKS
One money for Europe
EXCLUSIVE EURO POLL

FLAWED: Robert Maxwell proudly presents the first issue of his the *European* newspaper in Paris on May 11, 1990. Maxwell would die in an apparent boating accident the following year – before the scandal of the *Daily Mirror* pension fund emerged. Below, the first edition's front page

Photo: Getty Images

THE EUROPEAN

PLEA FOR RESPECT

FILM FANS IN CANNES

TEENAGE PRODIGY

ON YOUR MARKS

One money for Europe

West Germans to fund Soviet occupation costs

A EUROPEAN MAN

The *New European* columnist TIM WALKER, who worked on the original title as its diary editor, looks back on some high times and hints of scandal...

There was a gigantic banner in the *European*'s newsroom the night we launched emblazoned with the words "WELL DONE, BOB". Someone – it was not I – had inserted an L so it read "BLOB". I doubt I'd ever laughed so much than during my years on the paper. Money was no object – whose money it was I now wonder – and one of my first jobs was to head to Monaco to interview Prince Albert. I arrived by helicopter, stretched the assignment out to a full week, and learnt, among other things, to paraglide, before retiring each night, after some sumptuous dinners, to my enormous suite at the Hôtel Hermitage.

These were the years when Maxwell was beginning his decline and fall, but launching this newspaper was the noble act of an ignoble man. It was only after his death, and the paper went into administration, that the staff were sent letters by the accountants Arthur Andersen that showed where the money had been going. I was bemused to find that, although I'd believed I was the *European*'s diary editor, the job had been officially listed in the accounts as belonging to a woman now much in the news, Ghislaine Maxwell. Very handsomely she'd been paid for doing it too, even though she'd never contributed a single word.

THAT WAS THEN: *TNE* columnist Tim Walker during his time on the *European*

this is it. The Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall have collapsed. The spirit of ever-closer co-operation between member states of the European Community – surely the meaning of the jargon term 'political union' – is abroad. We are building on it. The success of the European Community and the prospect of a single internal market is proving a magnet for so many countries. It is a time for opportunity."

She was even making encouraging noises about the possibility of Turkey joining. Positivity for the project was the leitmotif running throughout her message. It doesn't sound like she was envisaging Britain's departure from the EC anytime soon. It would seem unthinkable to imagine anybody still a member of the parliamentary Conservative Party writing such an article today. And when one considers what a lightning rod for the most facile Brexiteer ambitions the former prime minister has since become, do the likes of Jacob Rees-Mogg and Mark Francois ever stop to ponder how far removed from Thatcher's pragmatism they have become? Do they ever wonder what on earth they have done? Better not tell them that the idea of a "United States of Europe" was first invoked by Winston Spencer-Churchill.

Elsewhere the newspaper reports extensively on the slow disintegration of the Soviet Union under its reforming general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. It survived until the last days of 1991 but the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were already attempting to cede from the USSR. And dissent was growing fast. "We praise the Russian Army that liberated us from fascism, but why did they stay so long?" asked Valdis Berzins, the foreign editor of an evening newspaper in Riga. All eyes were on Gorbachev. And we all know where the Baltic states reside politically now…

And in Yugoslavia, the previously communist nation that had yet to dissolve into the dreadful ethnic conflict that would presage its breakup, Croatia's new leader Franjo Tudjman declared his populist nationalist credentials in a hint of what was to come. "Like Mr Bush, Mrs Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl I am a Christian who believes in democracy," he pronounced. "If they are right wing, so am I." Tudjman was proposing that Yugoslavia become a federacy of the six states from which it was comprised, Croatia, of course, being one of them. He had fought a lengthy political campaign against Yugoslavia's long-time, but now deceased, communist leader Josep Tito (twice being jailed) and had been accused by the regime of "pro-Nazi nationalism". Almost one year later Croatia and Slovenia would declare independence. A violent denouement was just around the corner…

A couple more things catch the eye from the *European*'s pages, reading from the perspective of 2019. In a tiny story on a corner of page 15 it was reported that an American tycoon called Donald Trump had just purchased the Amels shipyard near Amsterdam.

Apparently his new yacht was being built there and "he liked the ship so much, he bought the company", he told reporters, while simultaneously stealing somebody else's well-crafted line. And on the back page was a report that television was taking control of football, driving away true fans, raising costs and making sure only the big clubs could qualify for the final stages of European tournaments. *Plus ça change*…

And one last thing. The weather map shows that it was raining in Britain. Natch!

After Maxwell's death in an apparent boating accident in November 1991 the newspaper was bought by the Barclay brothers, current owners of the *Telegraph*. And you thought the irony had peaked earlier in the story… In 1996, they installed Andrew Neil as editor. He would be succeeded by Gerry Malone under whose tenure the *European* finally ran out of steam in December 1998 (presumably the Barclays' Euroscepticism had taken root by then).

So it survived eight years… the *New European* is almost halfway there already. And with more battles set to come, its positive European message is as essential now as it was three decades ago.

EXPERTISE

THE DEAD CAT BRIDGE

Mitch Benn
Comedian,
Musician,
Writer

Of all the many kinds of lie one hears over the course of one's life, be they personal, professional or political, perhaps the most depressing lies are the ones that not even the liar expects to be believed.

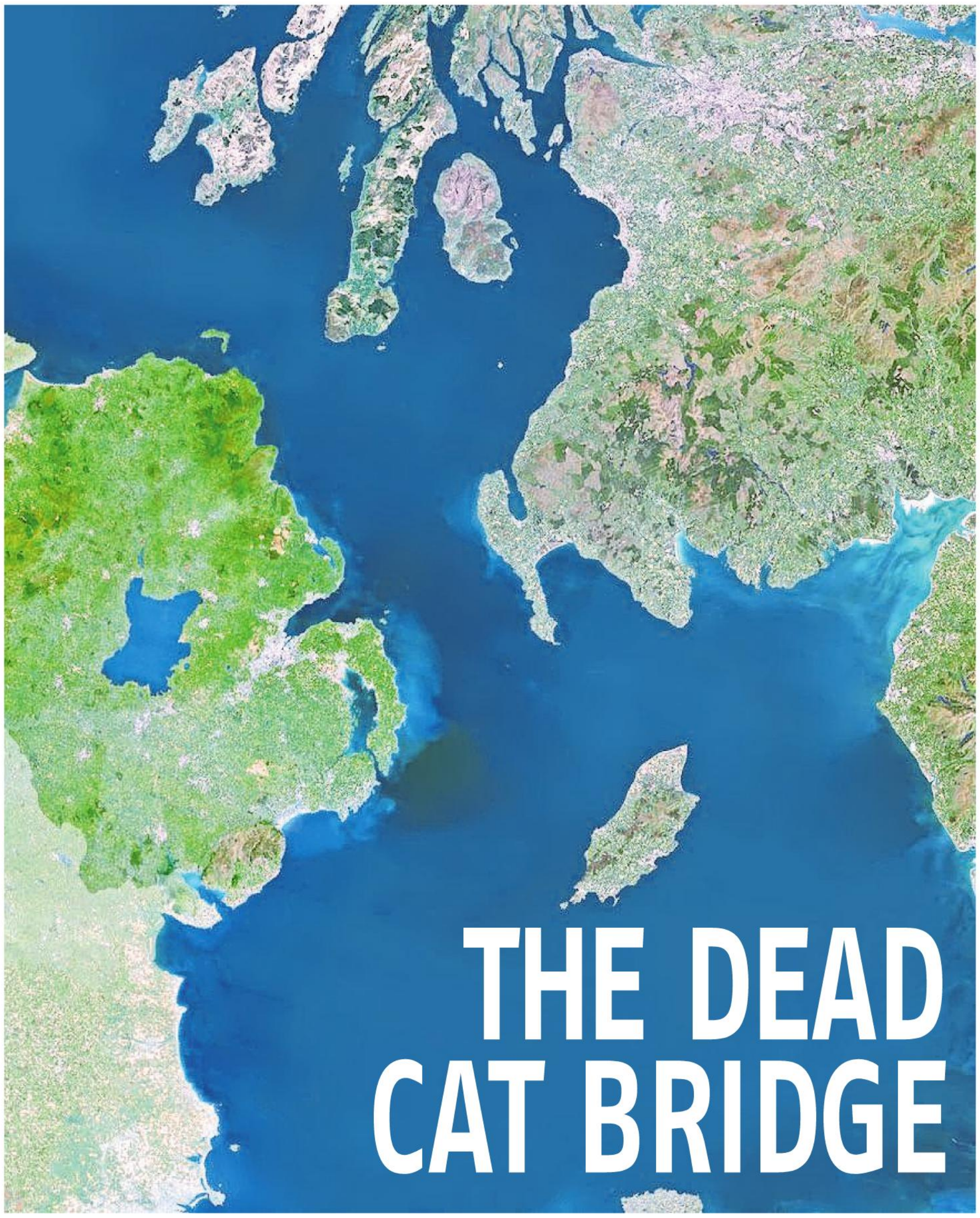
I don't mean lies told with a knowing wink to the camera and a "We all know this is made up" mischievous twinkle; I mean those lies droned out with a flat tone and a straight face, without conviction or even an attempt at conviction, by someone who knows that there's a transparently false narrative which must be sold and, moreover, that there's probably nothing that the recipients of the lie can do about it.

Speaking of things being sold, it's become particularly ironic this week that one stock response to hearing an outrageous untruth being peddled is something along the lines of "And if you believe that, I've got a bridge I'd like to sell you".

This expression refers back, it seems, to the case of one George Parker, a prolific and extraordinarily bold con artist who operated in New York in the early 20th century and who was especially fond of selling fraudulent deeds to great public landmarks, in particular the Brooklyn Bridge, which he "sold" on many occasions. Sometimes, this crime would only come to light when the new "owners" of the bridge tried to erect toll booths at either end.

It was difficult not to remember this cliché (or indeed Mr Parker himself) this last week upon hearing the announcement that "work has begun" on a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

First of all, it's particularly jarring and ironic that our present government should propose building a bridge "uniting" the two member countries of the Union which its own Brexit policies are in the process of driving out of that Union, thus engendering the hilarious prospect of the United Kingdom spending billions upon billions of pounds on a bridge connecting one foreign country to another. Seems rather redolent of the days of empire, though I doubt that that's the idea.



NEVER GONNA HAPPEN: The government is considering building a bridge to link Scotland and Northern Ireland
Photo: Getty Images

Secondly, it's worth pointing out that Boris Johnson has form where unnecessary and extravagant bridges are concerned. The now notorious Garden Bridge, a proposed floral walkway across the Thames which was approved and developed during his tenure as the mayor of London, was abandoned soon after he left office, amid spiralling costs, safety concerns and the revelation that planning had been allowed to proceed without the building rights to the land at either side of the river ever having been secured. By the time the project was cancelled, £43million of public funds had been squandered.

As soon as the "announcement" of the Scotland/Northern Ireland bridge was made, marine experts and civil engineers took to the internet to express the more or less unanimous opinion that such a structure would be not only unnecessary (and dementedly expensive) but impossible; in particular, military historians nervously pointed out that the proposed route of the bridge blunders straight through an area of seabed which was used as a dump for hundreds of tons of unused naval ordnance after the Second World War. Even if the bridge towers – which would, in places, have to be nearly a mile high – could be constructed and transported out into the open sea, they would then be planted on a floor of unexploded bombs.

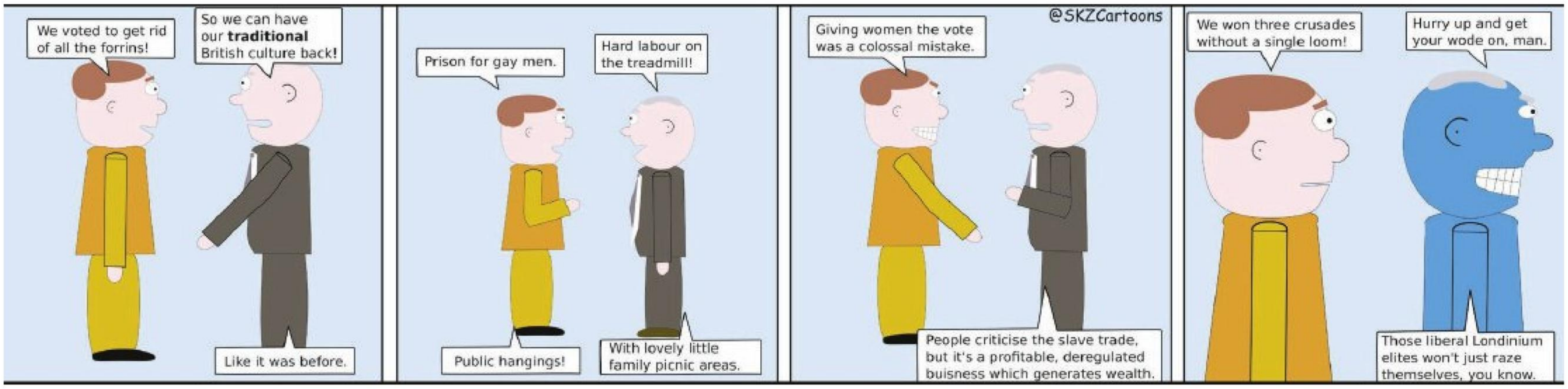
There's another expression you may have heard, this time originating in journalistic circles: the "dead cat" strategy. This refers to the deployment of an eye-catchingly horrendous but ultimately irrelevant story or idea in order to divert the public's attention from something equally horrendous but rather more relevant (the analogy being that if you were to suddenly slam a dead cat onto the table during discussions, everyone would be so alarmed and fixated by the sudden presence of the dead cat that they would forget whatever it was they were supposed to be discussing).

There was immediate consensus, among the Twittersphere at least, that the Never Gonna Happen Irish Sea Bridge announcement was just such a dead cat, which in turn begs the question: what are we being distracted from?

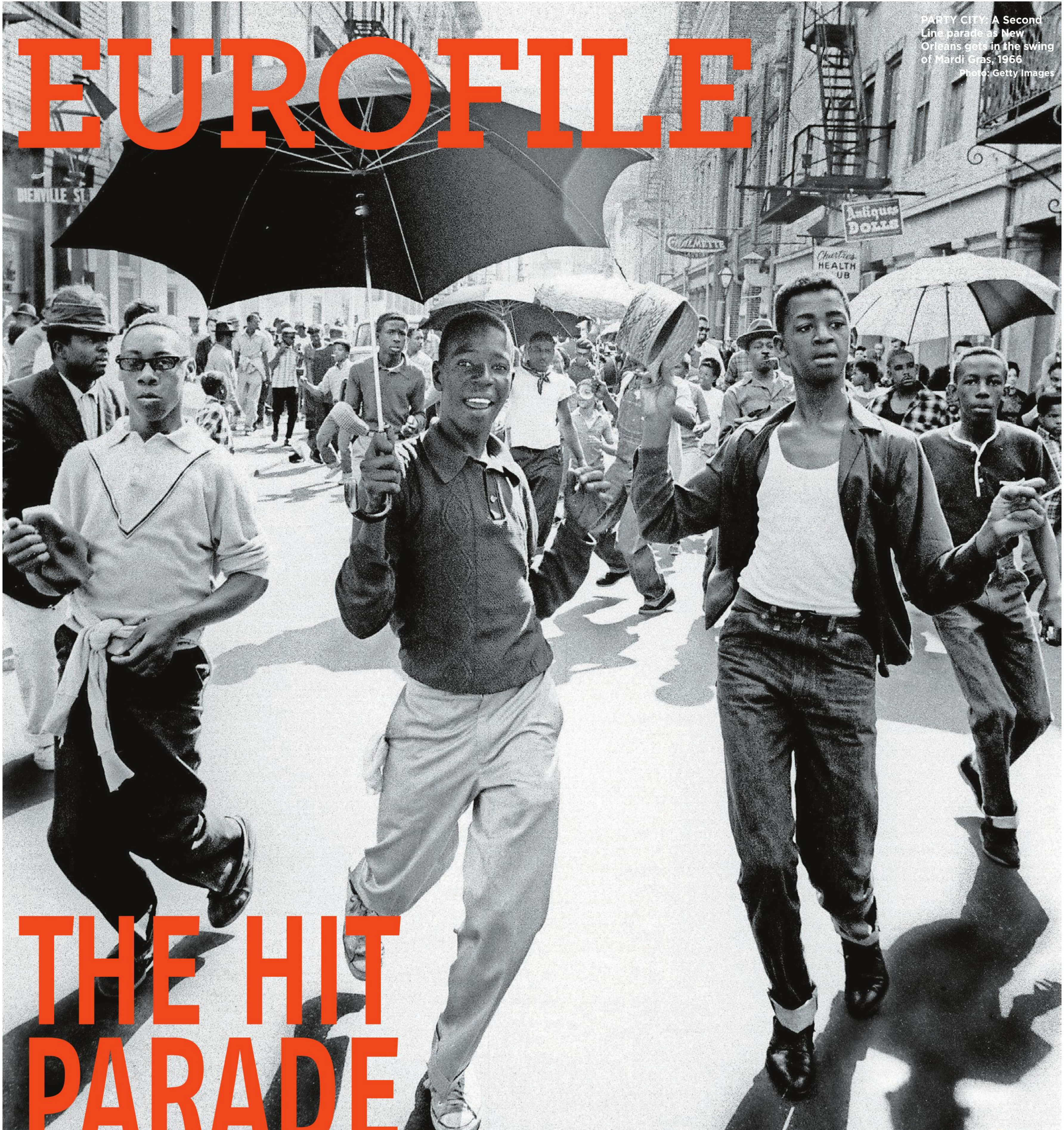
If, as is sometimes the case, the dead cat is being deployed preemptively to get everyone looking the wrong way so that they miss a damaging revelation a few days later, then at the time of writing it's still not apparent what that revelation is (perhaps you know by now). If, on the other hand, it's to maintain camouflage over something already "out in the open" but which the government would rather we weren't thinking about... well, where to start?

Could it be the new round of deportations? The fact that the Jennifer Arcuri case remains unresolved? The fact that the government is still sitting on the report into Russian interference in the 2016 EU referendum, perhaps because it might cast doubt on the legitimacy of that vote, and, as such, the legitimacy of literally everything that's happened since?

Maybe the bridge nonsense isn't a dead cat. Maybe this government is just lying because that's what this government does. With a straight face, a toneless voice, not even caring whether we believe them.


We voted to get rid of all the forrins!
So we can have our **traditional** British culture back!
Like it was before.
Prison for gay men.
Hard labour on the treadmill!
Public hangings!
With lovely little family picnic areas.
@SKZCartoons
Giving women the vote was a colossal mistake.
People criticise the slave trade, but it's a profitable, deregulated buisness which generates wealth.
We won three crusades without a single loom!
Hurry up and get your wode on, man.
Those liberal Londinium elites won't just raze themselves, you know.

EUROFILE


BIENVILLE ST
Antiques
DOLLS
HEALTH

PARTY CITY: A Second Line parade as New Orleans gets in the swing of Mardi Gras, 1966
Photo: Getty Images

THE HIT PARADE

AS NEW ORLEANS GEARS UP FOR MARDI GRAS, RICHARD HOLLEDGE EXPLAINS HOW THE CITY BECAME THE PARTY CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

It's party time in New Orleans. Well, it's always party time in New Orleans. But later this month is Mardi Gras – 12 days of parades, fun and good-natured bad behaviour, which reaches a gaudy crescendo on February 25 – Fat Tuesday.

That's the day (and night) when the biggest of the parades, the most extravagant floats and the grandest of the parties shimmer and shout their way around the city.

The French Quarter, home of the never-ending shindig, goes crazy on Huge Ass Beer and killer Hurricane cocktails from Pat O'Brien's Bar, usually nicely-behaved gals flash their breasts at crowds on the balconies of Bourbon Street for the reward of a string of beads. #MeToo movement? Forget it. The bands blare out, men dress as nuns, girls as tarts and everyone goes to the devil.

But there is more to Mardi Gras than a party. It is about race and class, art, culture and identity. It symbolises the gumbo of ethnicities which make up a contrasting city, in which, for a few days, black and white, the moneyed elite and the homeless sheltering under the flyovers of Interstate 10, unite in a raucous brotherhood. (For the uninitiated, *gumbo* is a strongly-flavoured stock of meat or shellfish and what locals call the "Holy Trinity" of vegetables, bell peppers and onions.)

That symbolism was well expressed in 2006, six months after Hurricane Katrina had all but destroyed the place, taking 1,800 lives with it. Many thought a jamboree as excessive as Mardi Gras should be cancelled but Paul McIlhenny, the late president of Tabasco, the potent pepper sauce manufacturer, disagreed most vehemently. He had been elected Rex, or King, of the Carnival, an arcane role which owes more to the pomp of a mediaeval monarchy than republican America, and declared: "If there was any time when we needed distraction, digression, diversion from the grind, it's Mardi Gras. We need to let it all hang out and, in the sense of pre-Lenten revelry, make sure we relax and recreate."

And they did. Parading past half-empty hotels through streets darkened by electricity failures and playing their way out of communities which had been flooded and wrecked beyond redemption. This was for the people by the people and it was impossible not to be moved by such noisy defiance.

That sense of pre-Lenten revelry was first recognised in America in March 1699, when the French explorers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Sieur de Bienville landed near present-day New Orleans and held a low-key celebration. They were following a tradition which dated back to the pagan festivals of spring and fertility and embraced by the new Christian emperors of Rome who decided to incorporate these popular traditions in the guise of Fat Tuesday – or Shrove Tuesday as it is known in Britain.

As this was on the eve of 40 days of fasting and penance, naturally, everyone indulged in eating and drinking as much as possible. As Christianity developed, Mardi Gras spread from Rome to France, Germany, Spain and England and on to colonies such as Brazil. But few embraced the day with more conspicuous enthusiasm than New Orleans with its street parties, masked balls and lavish dinners.

All that ended in 1763 when Louisiana came under Spanish rule and the

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The IVORY TEA ROOM
THE IVORY SHOP HAND CARVED GIFTS
Swinney

SPECTACLE:
1 The world-famous Mardi Gras Rex parade on New Orleans' Canal Street, 1961

2 A couple are followed down the sidewalk by a trio in costume during Mardi Gras, 1938

3 Revellers enjoy the 1960 Mardi Gras parade

4 Members of the Mondo Kayo Social and Marching Club parade down St Charles Avenue on Fat Tuesday at Mardi Gras, 2016

Photos: Getty Images

festivities were not revived until the state was sold to the US in 1812. The earliest parade took place in 1837 but the party really took off on a grand scale in 1857 when the first Mardi Gras with themed floats was held. Its beginnings were rather elitist – it was organised by six Anglo-American businessmen who were inspired by the pomp and pageantry of European royalty, something of an irony considering the American colonies had kicked out George III and all pomp and pageantry he represented in 1783.

They called themselves the Mistick Krewe of Comus – *krewe* an archaic spelling of crew and *Comus* as a nod to Milton's masque in which a virtuous lady is ensnared by an evil character inspired by the god of revelry. Very New Orleans.

Other krewes followed; the biggest and best known, Rex, was set up by local entrepreneurs in 1872, partly in honour of some long-forgotten Russian arch-duke who was in the city during the carnival season but also to lure tourism and business to a New Orleans struggling economically after the American Civil War.

Their surprise would be matched by their delight if they knew that about 1.4 million party lovers descended on the city for Mardi Gras in 2018, spending a staggering $164,274,980 (£127million).

Membership of the five earliest clubs – Rex, Comus, Momus, Twelfth Night and Proteus – was secret and restricted to the city's prosperous European population. But that secrecy was challenged in 1991 when the city council passed an ordinance that required social organisations, including the krewes, to certify publicly that they did not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Rex agreed but Comus refused and to this day they do not join the parades, though they still join elegant forces with Rex to hold their annual ball on Mardi Gras night.

Rex is perhaps the grandest of the krewes: it provides the Carnival King who rules for the day, dressed up in robes befitting a parody potentate and adorned wig, beard and moustache, doublet, hose and satin mask.

There are about 700 members of Rex, of whom about 450 will ride on the 27 floats, many still balanced on old wooden wagons, led by 36 mounted lieutenants in purple, green and gold, which symbolise justice, faith and power. A captain on a white horse leads the way.

The designs of the floats are kept secret, hidden in the Rex Den, a cavernous flat pack warehouse on the outskirts of the city whose anonymity hides the extravagance within.

Here, from the moment one Mardi Gras ends, designers work on what becomes a rolling art exhibit, a moving theatre in papier-maché.

The themes are dreamed up three to four years in advance with this year's entitled, "Omens and Auguries", a spectacular explosion of colour, capturing mankind's yearning to "divine the future," as Dr Stephen Hales the Rex archivist explains.

"The ancients looked to the heavens and to the natural world to find prophetic signs and symbols and our floats will include the Zodiac, the ancient prophetesses of Sybil as well as

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representations of the Ides of March when Julius Caesar was assassinated and the Three Witches from *Macbeth*."

The result, when added to the cheering crowds, the trumpets and the drums, the hurling of beads, doubloons and fake jewels is not just a sensory overload but, perhaps, a reassuring expression of glamour and privilege which is perpetuated by the balls which follow.

Again, secrecy is all; invitations are coveted, and eager guests are prepared to pay $120,000-plus to attend. In a throwback to a quaint ceremony in which upper crust debutantes were presented at the royal court – abolished by class-conscious Britain in 1976 – this is the moment the young, wealthy, women of New Orleans are given their formal introduction to society.

Even in the dark days post-Katrina, when the normally hectic Canal Street was half-lit and the French Quarter shrouded in gloom, women in their finest frocks and men in starched tuxedos traipsed to the Marriot Hotel for the debutantes' ball to witness daughters being escorted around the dance floor by proud daddies.

Their simpers of embarrassment were more than matched by smiles of delight as they curtsied to the king and queen of the krewe and teetered backwards in high heels to their place in the crowd – after all, one must never turn one's back on royalty.

But Mardi Gras is by no means only about the elite. Small krewes born out of specific interests and communities such as the Fools of Misrule, whose slogan is *Vivere vitam omnino* – Live life completely – have their day, as do the Knights of Babylon, founded in 1939 by a group of professionals called the Jester's Club, and the self-explanatory Kre de Paws of Olde Towne which is based at the Cafe du Bone Dog Bakery and Boutique. The Krewe of Bosom Buddies uses brightly coloured bras as throws.

But it is the music of the slaves and the African American community that has made the Big Easy celebrated and it is their spirit which gives Mardi Gras its beat. On February 25, the luxuriant blooms of the Rex floats will be preceded by a noisier krewe – the Zulus – or to give them their full title, the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club.

As the title suggests, the club, which was formed in 1916, has a mission not just to party, but to dedicate itself to "benevolence and goodwill and help the struggling".

Its costumes are wildly exotic; feathers, sequins and towering head dresses which echo the ebullient rituals of African ancestors but here there is a race issue within a race issue. The Zulus black up. This counter-intuitive gesture was born at the turn of the last century when they took severe offence at a group of white vaudevillians who had painted their faces black, wore straw skirts, and tossed coconuts around for a theatrical skit caricaturing a Zulu tribe.

It was, and is, meant to be satire, but not everyone sees the joke. In the 1960s opponents to the stunt advertised in the black community's newspaper the *Louisiana Weekly*: "We, the Negroes of New Orleans, are in the midst of a fight

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DONT TRY. I AM SLEEPING INSIDE WITH A BIG DOG, AN UGLY WOMAN, TWO SHOTGUNS AND
HAMMER
9/11/05 YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO MISS NEW ORLEANS
YALL COME BACK FOR CARNIVAL. I HAVE MY PARARADE SPOT COME BACK REX, IRIS, ZULU, BACCHUS, TOTH, PROTEUS, HERMES, MUSES, L'ETAT, ELKS, BABALON
HEY
ME
SOM
9/4/05 STILL HERE WOMAN LEFT FRI. COOKING A POT OF DOG GUMBO
RIVER PARISH DISPOSAL 738-7700

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Baccha Berry white

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SMOKEY MARY

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DEFIANT CITY:
1 Onlookers wait for a float in front of graffiti written in the wake of Hurricane Katrina while watching the Tucks parade during Mardi Gras, 2006
Photo: Getty Images

2 The Krewe of Bacchus parade at Mardi Gras, 2015
Photo: Getty Images

3 The Krewe of Orpheus parade rolls along the traditional Uptown parade route, 2016
Photo: Getty Images

4 Tractor power – but many of the floats are still on wooden wagons which would have been pulled by mules
Photo: New Orleans and Company

5 Drawing of floats in New Orleans' Mardi Gras, 1873. Signs on the floats make reference to topical stories, such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*
Photo: Getty Images

MARDI GRAS IN BREAKFAST, BRUNCH, BOOZE AND BEADS

New Orleans was voted the best city for food in the USA last year by Travel + Leisure magazine readers – so plenty to choose from on and near the parades.

At the top end...

Compère Lapin (535 Tchoupitoulas St)
Chef Nina Compton is from St Lucia and cooks distinctive, Caribbean-influenced dishes such as curried goat with sweet potato gnocchi and cashew nuts and southern fried "hot-fire" chicken with a spicy red sauce. It will provide grab-and-go sandwiches during parades.

So Bou (310 Rue Chartres)
This is your place for unbeatable brunch: mini cones of yellow fin tuna with pineapple ceviche, a hint of basil and avocado ice cream or tuna tacos in a sticky orange sauce.

Arnaud's (813 Bienville Street)
Round the corner from the brash bars and clip joints of Bourbon Street, this is an oasis of elegance; Belgian waffles in pools of strawberry and blueberry compotes, eggs hussarde – eggs, bacon, french bread with a dash of Hollandaise sauce.

For quick bites and boisterous bars...

Mother's (401 Poydras St)
An institution but none the worse for that. Ham, eggs and grits for breakfast.

Guy's Po-Boys (5259 Magazine St)
One of the best po-boy joints in town. (Po'boy, roast beef or fried oysters, lettuce, tomatoes served on fluffy French bread.)

Pizza Domenica (4933 Magazine St)
Pizza, pizzas and more pizzas. For parades, they will have grab-and-go pepperoni or cheese toppings along with beer and cocktails.

Apolline (4729 Magazine St)
The Uptown bistro will be selling alligator sausage po-boys, red beans and rice. Bar outside for parades.

Superior Grill (3636 St Charles Ave)
Americanised Mexican food. On Bacchus Sunday (February 11) a $25 wristband will be required to enter, although it comes with $20 in food and drinks credits. Not to be confused with the **Superior Seafood & Oyster Bar** along St Charles at 4338 which serves what its name suggests.

Emeril's Delmonico (1300 St Charles Ave)
Elegant restaurant with a second-floor dining room with a fine view of the parades.

Napoleon House (500, Chartres St)
Dates back to 1800s. Touristy but classic New Orleans. Try muffalettas (Italian bread over-stuffed with cold cuts, cheese, and olive salad).

For cocktail hours...

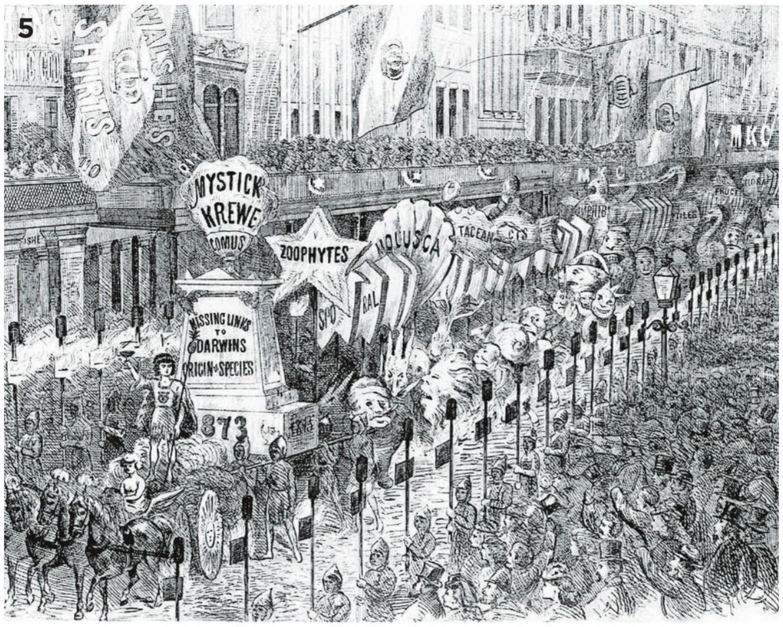
Old No 77 Hotel and Chandlery (Tchoupitoulas St)
Classy joint, classy cocktails such as Paris Between the Wars – scotch, pear cider and bitters with a dash of lemon – and the Andromeda, which mixes pisco and green chilli vodka with lime and grapefruit.

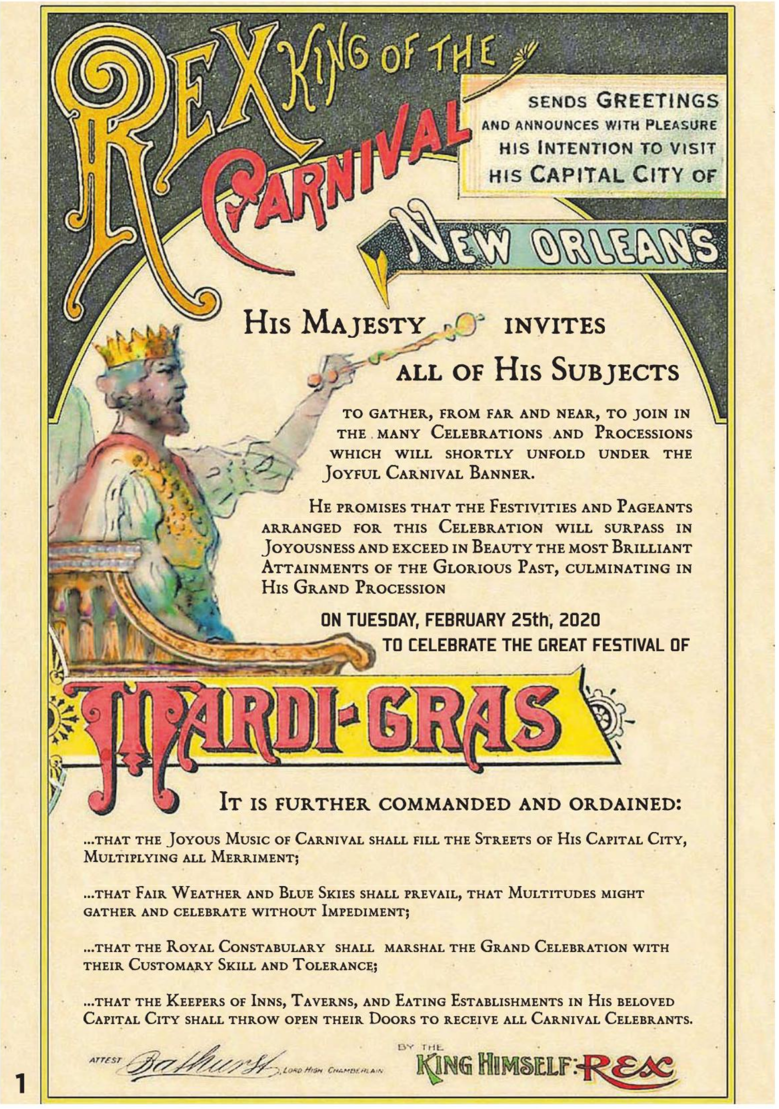
Arnauds (813 Bienville St)
As well as brunch, many stop by for their signature drink, the French 75, a mix of cognac and champagne.

Bombay Club (830 Conti St)
Has to be a sazerac here. Sugar ice cubes, rye whiskey and bitters. A few drops of absinthe.

Roosevelt Hotel (123 Baronne St)
Much hyped but with its elegant bar it is the place for a Ramos Gin Fizz; gin, lime and lemon juice, syrup, flower water, vanilla extract, one egg white and 25ml of double cream.

Brennan's (417 Royal St)
One of the city's most famous restaurants (rightly so) where a Brandy Milk Punch is an essential. Milk (or cream) and brandy, a little vanilla and syrup, topped off with nutmeg.





Rex King of the Carnival

Sends Greetings
and announces with Pleasure
his Intention to visit
his Capital City of

New Orleans

His Majesty invites
all of His Subjects

to gather, from far and near, to join in the many Celebrations and Processions which will shortly unfold under the Joyful Carnival Banner.

He promises that the Festivities and Pageants arranged for this Celebration will surpass in Joyousness and exceed in Beauty the most Brilliant Attainments of the Glorious Past, culminating in His Grand Procession

ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25th, 2020
TO CELEBRATE THE GREAT FESTIVAL OF

Mardi-Gras

It is further commanded and ordained:

...that the Joyous Music of Carnival shall fill the Streets of His Capital City, Multiplying all Merriment;

...that Fair Weather and Blue Skies shall prevail, that Multitudes might gather and celebrate without Impediment;

...that the Royal Constabulary shall marshal the Grand Celebration with their Customary Skill and Tolerance;

...that the Keepers of Inns, Taverns, and Eating Establishments in His beloved Capital City shall throw open their Doors to receive all Carnival Celebrants.

Attest Bathurst, Lord High Chamberlain

By the King Himself: Rex

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for our rights and for a recognition of our human dignity. Therefore, we resent and repudiate the Zulu Parade, in which Negroes are paid by white merchants to wander through the city drinking to excess, dressed as uncivilised savages and throwing cocoanuts (sic) like monkeys."

The krewe ignored them but last year the racial justice group TakeEmDown NOLA reignited the debate by protesting in front of the club's headquarters, demanding that it renounce blackface as a legacy of white minstrel shows which mocked African-Americans as "uncivilised simpletons".

The club that day responded by painting on black face and calling up a band to drown out the protests. Whether it is satire or a betrayal, the presence of the Zulus is a far cry from the elitist early days of the krewes. So too is the appeal of the quintessentially New Orleans' music heritage – the second line.

Historically, the African American community have taken part on the fringe of the big parades, in what are known as first and second lines. The first is a funeral march with a band led by the grand marshal or parade leader in a snazzy suit and jaunty hat, wielding a decorated umbrella.

Behind them, the second line – the ultimate New Orleans art form – a jazz funeral without a body.

Second liners might be connected to the deceased, just as likely not, but if a band breaks out in your neighbourhood you're going to join in, following as the musicians and an ever-growing crowd sing and dance their way from bar to bar.

Big names come out during Mardi Gras such as the Rebirth Brass Band, the Hot 8 Brass Band, and the Free Spirit Brass Band. Last year the Tremé Sidewalk Steppers led second liners past a bar or two – and oddly, a barber shop – to the Mother in Law Lounge owned by rambunctious trumpeter Kermit Ruffins who, between blasts of brass, serves up burgers on his mobile barbecue which he keeps parked on the street.

It is a legendary joint once owned by R and B singer Ernie K-Doe and where for years after his death his wife kept a life-size wax figure of her late husband by the bar. A tad unnerving.

It is tempting to say that these boisterous parties are where the outsider finds the authentic New Orleans, but without the pastiche "royalty" of the krewes and their exotic floats or the quaint formality of the debutante balls, the sophisticated, sleazy, alchemy that makes up New Orleans would be lost.

It is thanks to that gumbo of dreams that everyone can unite for a few hectic days in the quest for "distraction, digression and diversion".

PROUD TRADITION:
1 Poster promoting the Rex parade at Mardi Gras, 2020

2 Members of the Ninth Ward Marching Band during an unofficial parade, 2006 – the first Mardi Gras after New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina

3 The Zulu Parade entertains revellers, 2018

4 A brass band marches down Jackson Avenue in the Krewe of Zulu Parade, 2012

5 Crowds in Bourbon Street in the French Quarter of New Orleans for Mardi Gras, 2006

Photos: Getty Images

CAJUN FOOD v CREOLE

Cajun food owes its history to the French-speaking population who were expelled from Nova Scotia in 1755 by the British and made their way to France-owned Louisiana. (You can read an account in *The Scattered* by Richard Holledge.) Food is traditionally simple and solid. Creole is a person of mixed European and black descent and the food tends to be more spicy and exotic.

Best for Cajun:
Jacques-Imo's, 8324 Oak St.
Can be a queue. Breaded, fried rabbit with shrimp and pasta, or fried boudin balls.

Best for Creole:
Dooky Chase's, 2301 Orleans Ave.
Shrimp Clemenceau. Gulf shrimp, potatoes, mushrooms, and peas, topped with a rich lemon-butter sauce.

■ Want to know more? Visit the Southern Food and Beverage Museum, out of the centre at 1504 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.

LAISSEZ LES BONS TEMPS ROULER

Mardi Gras attracts around 1.4 million visitors – nearly four times the city's population. In 2006, 700,000 turned out for the first Mardi Gras post-Katrina.
Visitors spend around $3million at grocery stores, ie buying beer, wine and liquor.
In the 12-day period leading up to Mardi Gras, nearly 70 parades roll. An 18-float procession of a 450-member krewe can feature more than 75 people. When you add band members, dance groups, clowns and motorcycle squadrons, the number of participants often totals more than 3,000.
Some 25 million beads are throw, with 93,000 pounds of them recovered from the city's storm drains.
The average price for the VIP experience of riding a float is $3,000 and the typical float rider spends about $500 on beads, cups and souvenirs.
In 2018, 3,000 emergency calls were made during parade days, 96 illegal guns were confiscated and there were 471 arrests.

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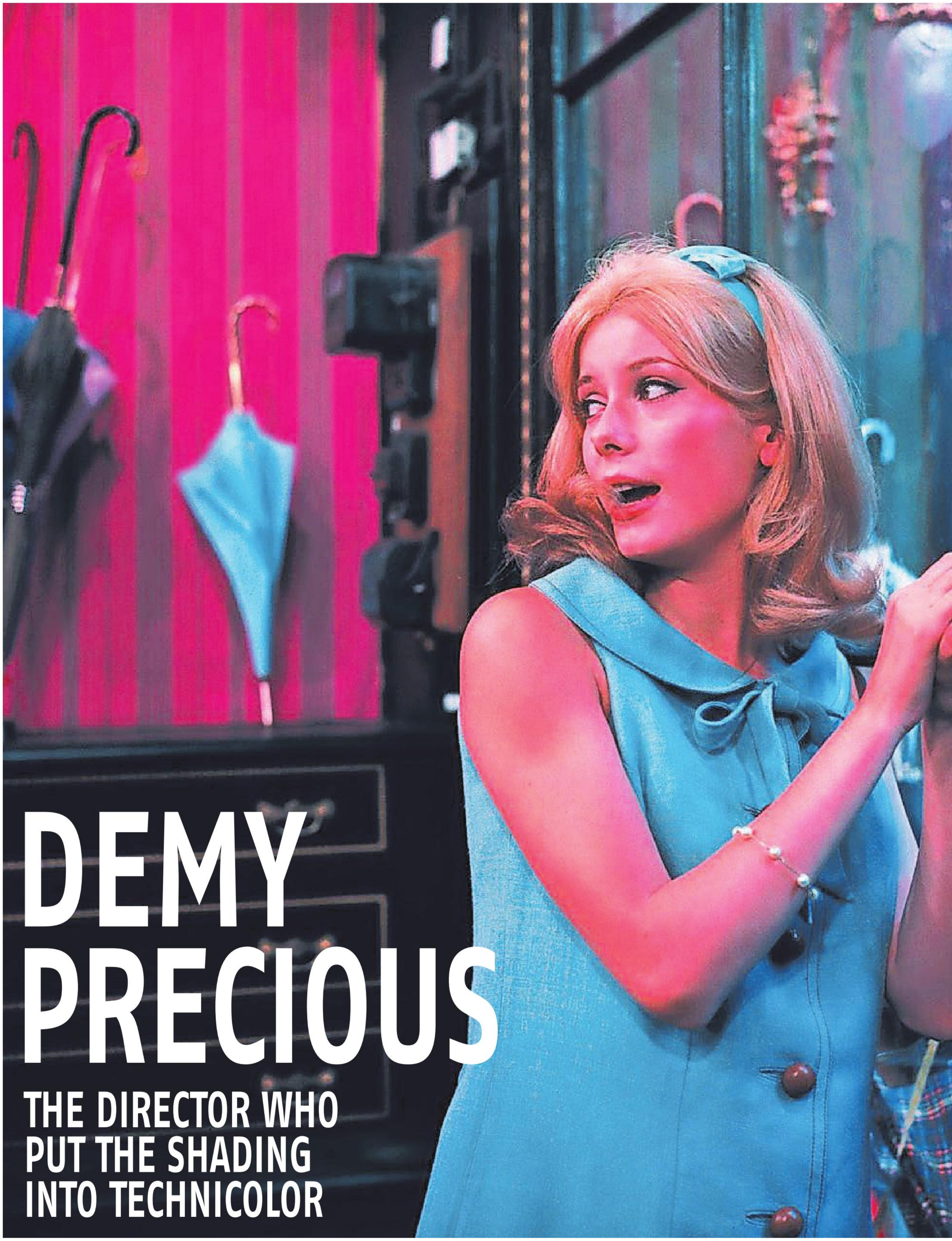

DEMY PRECIOUS

THE DIRECTOR WHO PUT THE SHADING INTO TECHNICOLOR

As a new collection of films by Jacques Demy is released, **JAMES OLIVER** shows how his colourful and passionate works also reflected shades of grey

The world would surely be a better place if it was more like the movies. Things would be tidier and more conclusive for a start. And who knows? Maybe people would even burst into spontaneous song and dance routines. When measured against Technicolor fantasias, real life is so often a disappointment, where people who deserve happy endings don't always get them.

Most of us simply accept this with a shrug, but Jacques Demy found it harder to move on. He was a filmmaker himself and this tension, between fiction and reality, was a theme he explored again and again in his work. Demy was no theoretician: his major films – newly gathered in an essential blu-ray boxset – brim with colour and passion. But look closer and you see a man preoccupied with the gulf between the world as it was and as we might want it to be.

He emerged as part of what became known as the French New Wave ('*nouvelle vague*'), a grouping of film lovers turned filmmakers who electrified cinema in the 1960s. Hindsight, though, shows that Demy was an uneasy fit with the movement. While most of the figureheads and leading lights (Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard) had emerged from film criticism, Demy's background was practical – he'd studied photography, then worked as an animator and assistant director.

Moreover, most of the New Wavers were thoroughly metropolitan. Demy lived in Paris but he was a hayseed next to a former street kid like Truffaut or the upper-crust Godard; he came from Nantes, an unremarkable city on the unfashionable Atlantic coast, where his father had been a mechanic and his mother a hairdresser. His love of movies was born visiting his local picture palace and, despite his later association with Parisian intellectuals, he never quite forgot the giddy rush he got when the lights went down and the main feature started.

Still, it was easy enough to place his debut – *Lola* (1961) – within the New Wave. As with Truffaut and Godard, Demy did not wear his cinephilia lightly: *Lola* is dedicated to Max Ophuls (a celebrated director of heartbreaking romances) and its title and plot nods to Ophuls' final masterpiece *Lola Montès*. But while Lola Montès was a 19th century courtesan who hobnobbed with composers and kings, Demy's Lola (Anouk Aimee) dances in a low-rent bar in Nantes, entertaining sailors and breaking hearts while waiting – yearning – for her lover to return and carry her off into the sunset.

It's full of moments that remind us of other movies – a young man, for instance, a hopeless dreamer called Roland (Marc Michel), becomes infatuated with Lola and gets involved in a criminal scheme that any B-movie gangster would be

proud of. But that's undercut by the sense of regret and loss that pulses through the film that shows us lives messier than the movies usually allow.

Demy's next film was also set by the seaside, albeit in more salubrious surroundings. *La baie des anges* (*Bay of Angels*) plays out in the casinos of Nice and Monte Carlo. Again, a callow young man falls for a worldly woman – and who cam blame him when she's played by Jeanne Moreau at her peak? She is a high-rolling gambler and, as the young man brings her luck, he's welcome in her world until he doesn't. This is not a realist's depiction of gambling addiction, but it captures the highs – the hit of a big score – better than anything else and Demy, unlike his characters, knows what the odds of long-term success really are.

Both *Lola* and *La baie des anges* were critical favourites and modest financial successes too, but it was his next film that really made his name. When *Lola* was released, Demy described it as "a musical without music" but he decided he wanted to go further. Working with composer Michel Legrand – a vital collaborator on many films – the director devised a full-length homage to the Hollywood musicals he so loved, with the story told in song not dialogue. Moreover, *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* ('*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*') would not be shot in elegant monochrome but in magnificently gaudy colour.

All this made it a more commercial proposition (that, and the actress Demy cast in the lead: Catherine Deneuve, at the start of a remarkable career). But don't think Demy was selling out: although the film works – quite perfectly – as melodrama, it's also his most probing work. No matter that he drew on the conventions of Hollywood cinema – the music, the production design – it's rooted in a real place: Cherbourg isn't usually thought of as romantic but Demy's camera makes it seem as beautiful as it would be to any first-time lover.

Despite all this artifice there's nothing phoney about the emotions. Deneuve plays Geneviève, a young woman who works in her mother's umbrella shop and who falls in love with Guy (Nino Castelnuovo). But they are to be parted, in what was then the cruellest way possible. This might be a candy-coloured entertainment but it touches a subject virtually no other French film of the time dared do; Guy gets called up to fight in Algeria, part of the – well, "savage" hardly does it justice – French response to the Algerian independence movement. To mention it in an ostensibly escapist romance was audacious indeed.

But life goes on in Cherbourg. Geneviève meets someone else, a nice chap, and when Guy returns, he discovers that she is married. Once he gets over his broken heart, he marries someone else too. Both relationships are solid (strong enough to survive the brief moment when the former lovers inevitably meet one last time) and everyone is happy enough. It's just that things aren't quite as wonderful as once they were. But isn't that how things usually shake down? It might be as far from "realism" as it is possible to get but no one (except a few lucky souls) can say it isn't true to life.

(By the way, if anything mentioned above reminds you of recent Oscar

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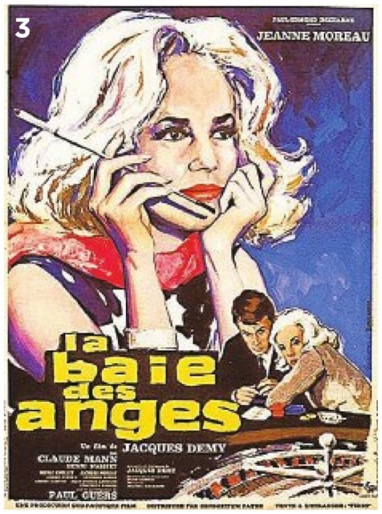

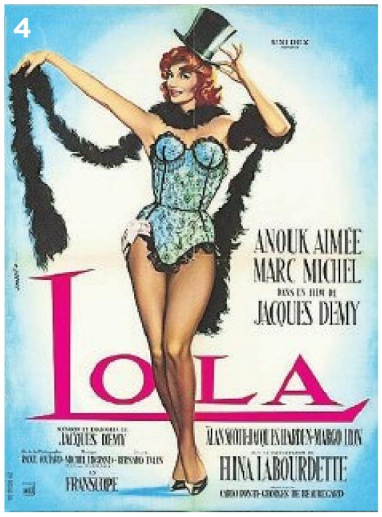

HOMAGE TO HOLLYWOOD:
1 The 21-year-old Catherine Deneuve starred in *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964)
Photo: IMDB

2 Jeanne Moreau in Jacques Demy's *La baie des anges* (1963)
Photo: IMDB

3 Poster for *La baie des anges*
Photo: IMDB

4 Poster for Demy's film debut *Lola* (1961)
Photo: IMDB

5 Demy directs sisters Françoise Dorléac, left, and Catherine Deneuve in *Des Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967). Dorléac was killed in a car crash three months after the movie's release
Photo: Getty Images

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winner *La La Land* then that isn't a coincidence; Damien Chazelle, director of that film, has called *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* "the greatest movie ever made".)

Demy followed *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* with a companion piece, *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (*The Young Girls of Rochefort*), another musical that finds unexpected glamour in an unloved Atlantic port. But it's bigger and brighter – to star alongside Catherine Deneuve and her sister Françoise Dorléac, Demy recruited Gene Kelly, star of his favourite musicals. The melancholy of the previous film has dissipated and the mood is more frivolous, gloriously so.

These days, there are many who'll tell you it's a masterpiece but it was more coldly received at the time. This was 1967; the mood in France was turning more political and here was Demy making a confection. Things weren't helped when it was revealed that Demy was off to make a film in America. For all his generation loved American cinema, the US itself was rather less loved in the age of Vietnam.

Still, Demy was determined to go and relocated with his family (he'd married Agnes Varda – a formidable filmmaker in her own right – in 1962). The film he made there was called *Model Shop*. A more naturalistic film than he had made thus far, it continues the story of Lola, from his first film; she's washed up in Los Angeles, working as a model for amateur pornographers when she catches the eye of a young man called George (Gary Lockwood), another of Demy's daydreamers. Lola wants to return to France while George has been drafted to Vietnam; neither is happy but somehow they convince each other to keep going.

A failure on first release (Demy called it "Model Flop"), it's only grown in stature since; it was a major influence on *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, for instance, and it's one of the great films about LA. But that appreciation came later: at the time, he returned home to make a fairy tale adaptation called *Peau d'Âne* (*Donkey Skin*), a film that even admirers describe as "kitsch". It was his biggest commercial hit, allowing Demy to indulge his taste for make-believe in subsequent films. Perhaps indulge it too much, in fact: the later work has its admirers but rather more detractors, who find the films lightweight and slightly laboured. Only *Une chambre en ville* (*A Room in Town*) (1982), a tale of murder and abuse that's both a return to musicals and the darkest thing he ever made, captures some of the old magic.

He died aged 59 in 1990, of leukaemia, so it was first announced. Later on, Agnes Varda revealed, actually, it was complications from Aids. Demy was bisexual and had apparently contracted the virus during a brief separation from Varda in the mid-1980s.

But let's not dwell on his end; he should be remembered and celebrated for the work, which seems greater than ever. For all the moments of sadness in his work, few filmmakers knew how much joy was part of life, and fewer still who could put it on screen so well.

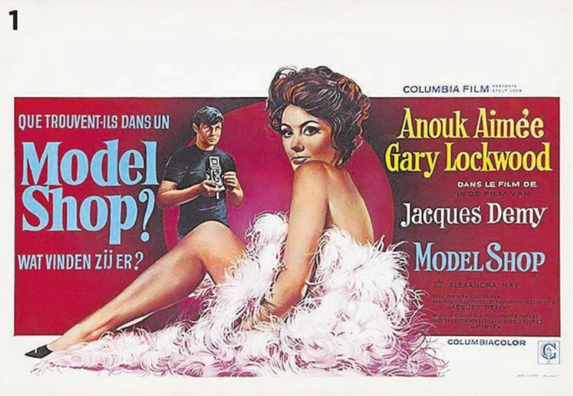
■ *The Essential Jacques Demy* is released on February 17 on The Criterion Collection; *Model Shop* is available on Arrow Academy

INFLUENTIAL:
1 Poster for *Model Shop* (1969)
Photo: IMDB

2 Anouk Aimée in *Model Shop*
Photo: IMDB

2 Poster for Jacques Demy's *Donkey Skin* (1970)
Photo: IMDB

4 Dominique Sanda in *Une chambre en ville* (1982)
Photo: IMDB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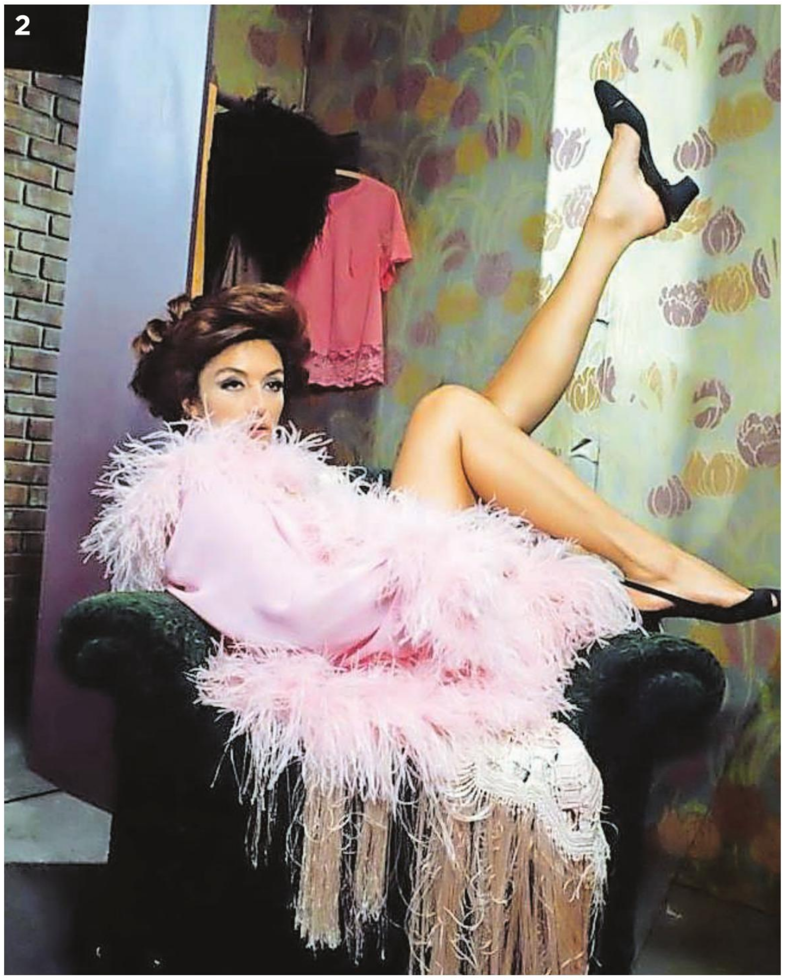
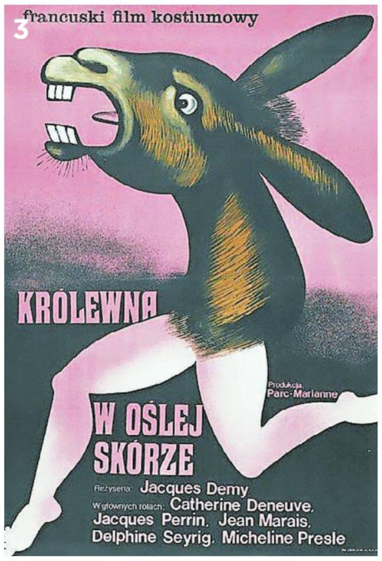
QUE TROUVENT-ILS DANS UN
Model Shop?
WAT VINDEN ZIJ ER?
COLUMBIA FILM
Anouk Aimée
Gary Lockwood
DANS LE FILM DE
IN DE FILM VAN
Jacques Demy
MODEL SHOP
ALEXANDRA HAY
JACQUES DEMY
COLUMBIACOLOR

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francuski film kostiumowy
KRÓLEWNA
W OŚLEJ SKÓRZE
Produkcja Parc-Marianne
Reżyseria Jacques Demy
W głównych rolach Catherine Deneuve, Jacques Perrin, Jean Marais, Delphine Seyrig, Micheline Presle

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Shanghai

A CITY IN MUSIC

THE MEGA MUSIC CITY

Once a byword for glamour and exuberance, the Chinese city was effectively silenced for much of the 20th century. But it is now finding its voice again, says **SOPHIA DEBOICK**

Few places have been subject to such a mix of cultural influences as Shanghai. Korea, Japan and Taiwan lie just across the sea, but when its port became a target for western governments seeking influence in the east in the 19th century, it became an international city. In the aftermath of the First Opium War the old Chinese walled city of Shanghai was engulfed by the British and American International Settlement and the French Concession and Shanghai became a magnet for both expat globetrotters and grindingly poor labourers from all over China. In the first half of the 20th century, Chinese pop would be born in the city, initially as Mandarin-language music (later christened "Mandopop"), but sparking a tradition of East Asian popular music that became adopted across the region.

The father of Chinese pop, composer and songwriter Li Jinhui, was born in Xiangtan, Hunan province, 200 miles from Shanghai. Aged 21 when the Republic of China was proclaimed in 1912, Li was from an educated family. His brother, the linguist and composer Li Jinguang, was Mao Zedong's language teacher and the brothers would play a part in shaping a new, post-Imperial China in the hopeful 1920s, when the New Culture movement embraced the values of science and democracy.

Li Jinhui saw promoting Mandarin as the key to modernising a country where most people still used only their local dialect, and he believed entertainment was the most effective way to do it. He formed the touring Bright Moon Song and Dance Troupe, and although their childlike, didactic songs hardly seemed like the seed from which a new Chinese popular culture would grow, it would be where the greatest stars of China's golden age of entertainment, of which Shanghai was the centre, got their start.

While Li's troupe toured the country, jazz was establishing a foothold in Shanghai. The year after the Communist Party of China was founded in the city, Whitey Smith, a Danish-born San Franciscan drummer, arrived there and began playing a version of jazz adapted to the Chinese emphasis on melody.

Four years later, in 1926, pianist Teddy Weatherford, who would later take jazz to India, arrived in the city with the bandleader Jack Carter. Li Jinhui didn't need much persuasion to adopt this new sound that was sweeping the globe, and the result was his song ***Drizzle*** (1927), released by the Shanghai-based Pathé Orient and sung by his 18-year-old daughter, Minghui.

This was the first Chinese pop song, and its use of Mandarin, as well as the very spectacle of a woman performing solo, were signs of the new values young idealists like Li were championing. The song marked the birth of shidaiqu – a fusion of American popular jazz and Hollywood film music and the distinctive vocal style and melodies of Chinese folk music – that would dominate Chinese pop into the next decade and beyond.

As the 1930s dawned, Shanghai became a jazz city for the cosmopolitan, international crowd and the wealthy minority of the Chinese population. The Canidrome, on what is today Central Fuxing Road, was a vast dog racing track built in 1928, but it also had a grand ballroom which became the centre of Shanghai's nightlife.

When Teddy Weatherford brought jazz trumpeter Buck Clayton over to form a house band there in the mid-1930s, the Harlem Gentlemen, as they called themselves, became the hottest ticket in town. Later resident at the more downmarket Casanova ballroom on Avenue Edward VII, now part of Yan'an Road, Clayton joined the Count Basie Orchestra on his return to the States, but not before teaming up with Li Jinhui and schooling him directly in the jazz sensibility. Shidaiqu was poised to enter its golden age.

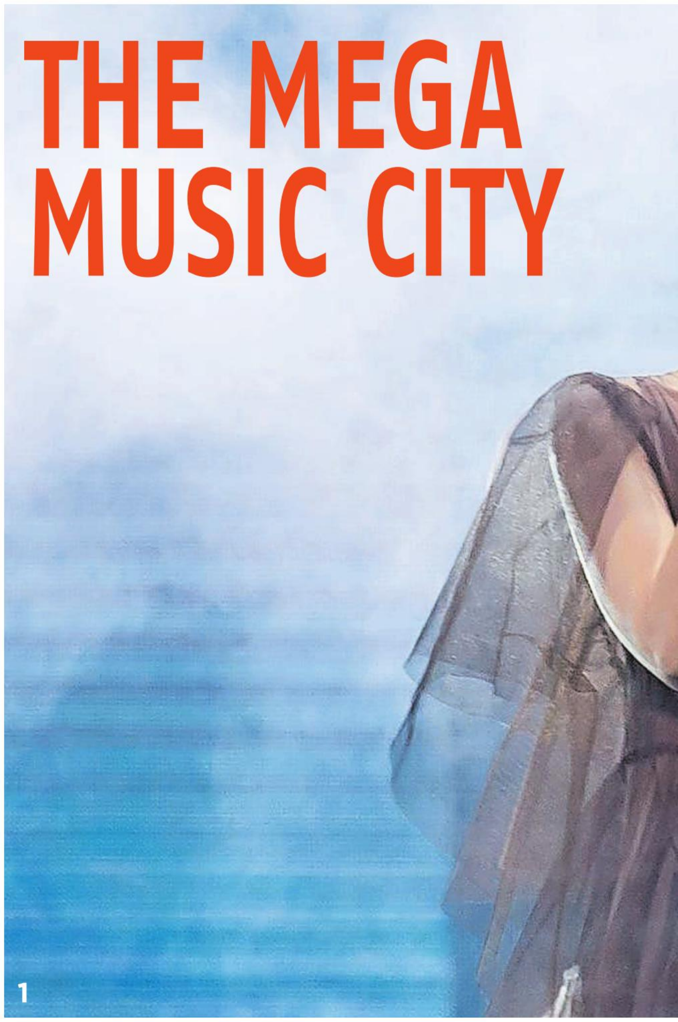
The nascent Shanghai-based Mandarin-language recording industry, with Li Jinhui as its premiere songwriter, created enduring musical legends in the 1930 and 1940s. The Seven Great Singing Stars, as they were dubbed, were the female superstars of Chinese pop, as well as of the growing Chinese film industry (Li's adoptive daughter and former Troupe member, Li Lili, would also be one of China's great early film stars).

All born between 1916 and 1922, this Seven were the dominant faces of Chinese pop culture from the late 1930s. The most famous of the Seven, Zhou Xuan, was dubbed "the Golden Voice". She had had a rootless childhood before joining Li's Troupe and finding fame in the 1937 film, *Street Angel*. Bai Hong, known as "the White Rainbow", was married to Li Jinguang.

The Shanghai-born Gong Qiuxia had started out as a tap-dancing child performer before making her first film in 1936. Yao Lee was known as "the Silver Voice" to Zhou Xuan's "Golden Voice", and sang many songs by her tunesmith brother, Yao Min. The beautiful, Japanese-born Li Xianglan (née Yamaguchi Yoshiko) would be particularly successful in film, while Bai Guang (literally "White Light") had a sultry-voice quite unlike those of the rest of the Seven. Wu Yingyin, meanwhile, defied her scientist parents to pursue a showbusiness career, getting her break by winning a singing competition at Ciro's nightclub on Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai, and subsequently signing with Pathé.

Between them, the Seven Great Singing Stars produced the standards of Chinese popular song. Zhou Xuan's songs from *Street Angel* (1937), ***The Wandering Girl Singer*** and ***Song of the Four Seasons***, showcased her incredibly high, nasal tone. ***Night Life in Shanghai***, from the 1947 film *An All Consuming Love*, where Zhou played the lounge singer wife of a murdered nationalist secret agent, captured the mystique of a city where "The bright lights go on, the cars roar, dance music leaps". Yao Lee's ***Rose Rose, I Love You*** (1940), written by Shanghai-born songwriter Chen Gexin, would later be covered by Frankie Laine and Petula Clark. Li Xianglan's hypnotic ***Fragrance of the Night*** (1944) was written by Li Jinguang, while the mournful ***Waiting For Your Return*** (1948) made Bai Guang famous and, being very similar to the famous *Sentimental Journey* (1944), highlighted her similarity to Doris Day.

But these songs were recorded against a backdrop of chaos in Shanghai. Ongoing civil war between communists and nationalists was punctuated by the Battle of Shanghai of 1937 and the subsequent Japanese occupation. By 1943 most ex-pats had left the city and Shanghai's party was over. With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the Canidrome became an execution site and shidaiqu music was banned.



SHANGHAI STYLE:
1 Faye Wong on stage during her Faye's Moments Live concert at Shanghai's Mercedes-Benz Arena, 2016 in Shanghai

2 Li Xianglan, who appeared in English language movies using the stage name Shirley Yamaguchi, 1956

3 Teresa Teng, 1980. Teng's recordings were the last hurrah for the distinctive Shanghai pop sound

Photos: Getty Images

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Night Life in Shanghai
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He Ri Jun Zai Lai
Teresa Teng

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3

Pathé and most of the Seven Great Singing Stars upped sticks for the safety of British-held Hong Kong. Li Xianglan was arrested as a Japanese collaborator but later escaped, first to Japan, where she worked with Kurosawa, and later to Hollywood. Zhou Xuan died in a mental asylum aged only 37 during the anti-rightist purges of the late 1950s. Chen Gexin died during the Great Chinese Famine, while Li Jinhui himself, already finding his songs criticised on many sides as "yellow music" (in other words, pornographic), died in prison at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Shanghai – once so inviting – was closed, the creators of the music that had once been a byword for glamour and exuberance were scattered or dead.

SHANGHAI ON SCREEN

The glamour of 1930s Shanghai has proved seductive to Hollywood. Josef Von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* (1932) featured Marlene Dietrich ('Shanghai Lily') and Anna May Wong as two vampish good time girls, blasting out hot jazz on a portable phonograph as they share a train compartment on a treacherous journey through revolutionary China. Von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941) was set in an opium smoke-filled 1930s Shanghai casino, while Spielberg set the opening of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) in a nightclub in the city in 1935, with a Mandarin version of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*. Merchant Ivory's *The White Countess* (2005) focused on the eponymous nightclub, a microcosm of the decline of cosmopolitan Shanghai as the Japanese closed in, in 1937.

But in the 1970s, Shanghai was central to the slow opening up of China, and shidaiqu made a comeback. Premier Zhou Enlai and president Richard Nixon met in the city in 1972 and signed the Shanghai Communiqué which began a normalisation of relations. By the end of that decade, pop music – so often the canary in the coalmine for freedom of expression – resurfaced after decades of communist cultural stranglehold.

In 1978, the commercial Shanghai Audio Visual Company was founded when the monopoly of the state-run China Record Corporation was ended, and the same year Taiwanese singer Teresa Teng, who became the biggest popular star in China before her untimely death in 1995 aged just 42, covered songs like Zhou Xuan's ***When Will You Return?*** (1937) and Li Xianglan's ***Fragrance of the Night***, as well as reviving many of Li Jinhui's songs. These heavily nostalgic renderings of songs associated with a pre-communist past were a strong signal of the loosening of censorship.

Teng's covers were the last hurrah of a distinctive Shanghai style as the Cantonese-language "Cantopop" developed in Hong Kong, and Taiwanese, Japanese and South Korean influences came to bear on an increasingly shared East Asian pop music culture.

By the 2000s Shanghai had become a centre for music publishing and distribution, but Beijing was the recording centre for Chinese pop, where stars like Faye Wong demonstrated the diversity of "C Pop", recording in both Cantonese and Mandarin and often incorporating elements of non-pop musical styles into their work. But today's Mandopop could not have existed without Li Jinhui and the stars of the 1930s and 1940s, and a direct line can be drawn from 1927's *Drizzle*, where rain was used as a wistful metaphor for frustrated love ("Drizzle and rain, don't be such a pain") to Wong's *Sky*, (1994), a Chinese karaoke favourite, which asks, with similar sentiments, "Why is my sky dripping wet tears?"

STAGE REVIEW
BY TIM WALKER

THE COURAGE TO FAIL

Endgame/Rough for Theatre II

Old Vic, London, until March 28

★★☆☆☆

Stephen Unwin, in his excellent book *So You Want To Be A Theatre Director?*, came as close as anyone to defining what it is to give an effective performance on stage. "The good actor has an easy access to his emotions, and knows how to share them with an audience: his thought processes are clear, and the audience can follow them," he writes.

"He immerses himself in the part he's playing, but he also enjoys being watched. He acts with a kind of playful confidence and energy that is infectious. The audience relaxes, because they know the actor is in control."

Unwin's words ran through my head as I watched Daniel Radcliffe in the Old Vic's Samuel Beckett double bill, *Rough for Theatre II* and *Endgame*. If I'm honest, I could never entirely relax as I didn't feel the young actor was ever totally in "control".

Radcliffe clearly yearns for acceptance as a proper theatre actor, but the problem is his formative years were spent exclusively in front of cameras. He was just 10 when he appeared in a BBC adaptation of *David Copperfield*, followed by his cinematic debut in 2001's *The Tailor of Panama*. At 11, he was cast in the title role of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and the ensuing instalments kept him busy for the next decade. When he should have been experiencing real life – the stuff on which every actor draws – he was in a world of make-believe.

There is in both the Beckett works one big star turn and one or more supporting roles. Tellingly, Radcliffe chooses to leave the star turns to Alan Cumming. In the first, Radcliffe plays a plodding official working alongside Cumming as his flamboyant and bequiffed colleague. They are assessing the life of a third character, standing silently on a window ledge, contemplating suicide.

It's puzzling why the director Richard Jones should have felt the need to kick the evening off with *Rough for Theatre II*, as it feels like merely a supporting feature that it's necessary to sit through before getting to the main attraction.

Endgame is a lot more satisfying and it gives Radcliffe a bit more to do, but, once again, he's no more than a dull factotum to Cumming as his overbearing and this time bald-headed boss, coping with life in a post-apocalyptic world. What laughs Radcliffe manages to elicit are from puerile visual gags: he's endlessly going up and down ladders (nearly slipping off once) to open curtains in the room that are hung much too high up.

Cumming as ever just plays Cumming and it's the two unfortunates in dustbins – Karl Johnson as his dad and Jane Horrocks as his mum – that provide the most memorable performances of the evening.

Radcliffe is a disappointment, but top marks to him for having the guts to pick works quite as challenging as these, and for daring to have – in the words of the late Christiaan Barnard – the courage to fail.

CHALLENGING: Alan Cumming and Daniel Radcliffe in *Endgame*

A LIFE LEFT ALONE

CHARLIE CONNELLY on a moving novel about a modern-day hermit, living a complex existence high up in the Alps

Sometimes the life of a hermit can be a very appealing prospect. Not being answerable to anyone, living entirely self-sufficiently and feeling completely separated from the comings, goings and machinations of the rest of the world and its people. Sounds great right now, doesn't it? Oh, dear me, yes.

History is littered with some excellent hermits. There was Simeon Stylites, for example, the fifth century ascetic who took to living on top of a succession of poles for more than 30 years, each higher than the last, each a little further away from the world. More recently and closer to home there was James Lucas, the 19th century "Hertfordshire Hermit", a qualified doctor who, following the death of his parents, moved into the back kitchen of the family stately home, took to wearing a blanket fastened with a wooden peg and never ventured outside again while the house fell into disrepair around him. He gained a degree of fame and would happily receive visitors, including on one occasion Charles Dickens who wrote about the encounter for *All The Year Round* under the title 'Tom Tiddler's Ground'.

Dickens wasn't the only literary figure fascinated by the solitary life and authors have often turned to hermits and loners in their fiction to create some unforgettable characters, from Miss Havisham to Boo Radley. It's the ultimate in escapism for the reader, a character who has rejected or been rejected by the world and whose only concern is their immediate surroundings.

It also gives the writer a blank canvas: there are no rules, laws or accepted tropes in the hermitic life so it's a character the author can, in theory, take anywhere they please. In addition, it's an attractive challenge for a writer's imagination to conjure a view of the world from someone who has entirely rejected its influence. An exciting storytelling opportunity it may be, however, but it's also very easy to get wrong. A blank canvas is all very well as long as you have something convincing with which to fill it.

The last few weeks in particular have seen the appeal of the hermitic life expanding rapidly. The ultimate disconnect from the effluent churn of current affairs sounds good to me after four years of engaging with debates and hearing people out who have "legitimate concerns". A little hut by a lake in the middle of nowhere – perhaps with a good few years' worth of Frazzles and Crunchies close at hand – sounds incredibly attractive these days, even if the reality might prove unworkable (I'd miss Charlton Athletic too much. Also, my wife).

In the place of becoming an actual hermit, and with a desire to immerse myself in something suitably European in order to escape the parochial snarling now dominating the national discourse, I turned to *Snow, Dog, Foot* by the Italian novelist Claudio Morandini.

Published this week by Peirene Press, this new translation is a result of the imprint's ingenious Peirene Stevns Translation Prize, in which entries are invited for literary translations by previously unpublished translators with the winner gaining a book-length commission and a two-month residency in the Pyrenees. J. Ockenden's rendering into English of Morandini's book, first published in Italy in 2016 where it was a bestseller, is the result of their winning the 2019 competition.

A book in which we inhabit the world of a solitary character, especially when the horizons of that world are so narrow as to be claustrophobic, has to win over the reader from the start then maintain that world in such a way that we are prepared to live in it for the duration of the novel.

Adelmo Farandola lives in a hut on a (presumably) Alpine mountainside, a dwelling so ramshackle it's easy from some angles to mistake it for a pile of rocks. He's an old man whose many years of solitude have made him as irascible as he is vulnerable: during the summer passing hikers can expect a hail of stones if they stray too close but he becomes almost childlike on his twice-yearly descent to the village for supplies.

We learn early in the book that he used to make more regular excursions, always unseen, on high days and holidays in order to listen to the band. He'd hide himself behind a wall and listen to the "confused swirl of notes" that bounced off several surfaces before reaching his ears. Eventually he stopped these visits, "because someone had seen him and come up to him, hand outstretched, and tried to engage him in conversation".

We learn a little of why Adelmo has taken to the hills. There's a hint of heartbreak when he dreams about the band, and walking behind the musicians singing, the centre of attention, half-remembered incidents from a half-remembered youth where girls talk to him and he fights local youths for their honour.

The stronger hint is of wartime trauma, flashbacks of a time "when the valleys were haunted by men in heavy greatcoats who muttered incomprehensible words as they lined up everyone they came across and shot them without much ceremony". Having hidden in the mountains and remained undiscovered by these deadly interlopers it seems Adelmo just never went home.

The most obvious comparison for *Snow, Dog, Foot* would be with the Austrian author Robert Seethaler's 2014 international bestseller *A Whole Life*. Like Adelmo, Seethaler's protagonist takes to the Alpine slopes for life as a hermit, dipping into "civilisation" only when he has to. While Seethaler doesn't glamorise a life spent in solitude on a mountainside, a seam of romanticism runs through his book, a certain dignity, beauty even.

There is none of that in Morandini's creation. Not only is there nothing remotely romantic or beautiful about Adelmo's life, dignity is pretty thin on the ground too. For one thing, he is filthy. Absolutely rotten. He hasn't washed in months, possibly years, and there are graphic descriptions of the state of the man beneath his clothes. It's so long since he even rinsed his mouth, let alone cleaned his teeth, that his tongue has a white coating and he can barely taste any more. Warts and all doesn't even begin to cover it. You don't even want to think about where those warts might be, either.

SPLENDID ISOLATION: The Alps is the setting for a number of novels centring on a hermitic lifestyle

Picture: Getty Images

"You can't trust people who wash and live cleanly," he says. "They're the ones who get ill at the drop of a hat, from a tiny draught from a window, from someone sneezing in their face, from a moment of inattention."

Adelmo's diet barely even qualifies as subsistence level, especially during the winter when his cabin is completely buried by snow preventing him from going outside for months. He spends most of his year on the brink of starvation but in winter he has to rely on the supplies he's built up during the spring and summer, dried meat from the deer he's killed, rotting apples and a few tins bought from the village, and it's rarely enough.

Spending an entire book inside Adelmo's head would be a tall order, so thankfully there are two other significant characters here. A young ranger takes an interest in the welfare of the old man and respects his ways despite never seeing the oft-requested licence for his gun. But it's the mangy old dog that turns up and insinuates himself into Adelmo's life that makes the book such a

success. Soon after the dog's arrival Adelmo starts having actual conversations with him. First of all there's just idle chit-chat about food but before long he is actively seeking the dog's opinions on the predicaments of mountain life.

For a book that seems on the outside a grim prospect, *Snow, Dog, Foot* is very funny indeed (Morandini forged his reputation in Italy as a writer of radio comedy). The source of the humour is the dialogues between Adelmo and his canine companion and the fact these remain funny in English is testament to the quality of the translation. Rendering a carefully crafted narrative into another language is a tricky enough prospect, but jokes and comic dialogue require a special sensitivity to rhythm and timing to keep the laughs intact. Ockenden's translation has this in spades. A good example is when the dog is giving a lengthy, detailed and very funny monologue about the benefits and drawbacks of being a sheepdog, especially when bitches are in heat and driving the dogs half-mad with lust.

"For the rest of the year, as I say, it's completely different and all we think about is food and faeces like proper gentlemen," says the dog.

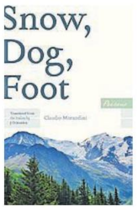
Of course the fact that Adelmo is having these conversations raises concerns about his mental health. When he goes to the village shop for his winter supplies and it turns out he'd already stocked up the previous week, an errand of which he has no recollection, the supposition is that he is in the early stages of dementia. Rather, I think it's more the product of spending all but two days every year in his own company. Until the dog arrives his entire existence is an interior monologue. His only sense of the world, its rights and its wrongs, is inside his own head combining memory, reality and imagination into a fuzzy Venn diagram. There's been no dissent in his world, no discussion, rendering his whole life entirely subjective, convinced that everything he thinks, says and does is correct behaviour from throwing stones at strangers to wallowing in his own filth.

There is an occasional smidgen of self-awareness. At one point Adelmo tells the dog that if he is, after all, mad, it's down to the power cables strung over the village where he grew up, and when the foot mentioned in the title enters the story, after the snows begin to melt, he is forced to confront the possibility he might have done something dreadful. Yet even at his most boneheaded Adelmo remains a nuanced, even likeable character whose presence stays with you long after closing the book.

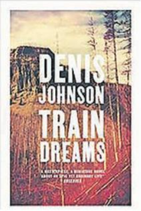
There's very little beauty in *Snow, Dog, Foot* and what there is turns out to be a brittle veneer. "It's worth rotting away inside for an entire season," says Adelmo, when he can finally emerge from the cabin into a world of pure whiteness, "it's worth risking death from starvation, just to feel this, to get drunk on whiteness and cleanliness".

Then immediately we're reminded how the whiteness barely hides the deterioration beneath, of trees, of foliage, of dead animals swept away by avalanches. As the snow melts the air fills with sights and smells of decay, reminding us that everything in the world is but a prelude to decomposition, and if this wonderful, funny, moving and unforgettable book has a message it's to remind us of this sobering truth.

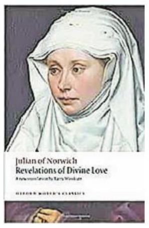
■ *Snow, Dog, Foot* by Claudio Morandini, translated by J. Ockenden, is published by Peirene Press, price £12



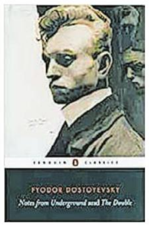
FIVE GREAT BOOKS ABOUT LONERS



TRAIN DREAMS
Denis Johnson
(Granta, £8.99)
Robert Grainier's early life is one of constant loss and heartbreak, a constant slapping down by life that gradually pushes him into a solitary existence in a remote cabin in the woods. Somehow in this short book – 128 pages – Johnson evokes a deep, yearning disconnection from the world and an intense sense of Grainier's grief combined with the relentless passage of time that leaves the reader reeling. A remarkable book.



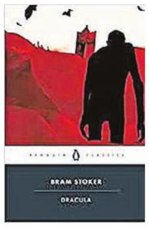
REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE
Julian of Norwich
(Oxford World Classics, £8.99)
The first book written in English by a woman, this collection of writings from the 14th century anchorite details the visions she experienced following a serious illness during the 1370s, after which she shut herself away in a cell connected to a church and rejected the everyday in favour of a life of prayer and meditation. Profound, subtle and deeply philosophical, this is a major work of the medieval period.



NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND
Fyodor Dostoevsky (Penguin Classics, £8.99)
Feted by some as the first work of modernist fiction and important piece of existentialism, Dostoevsky's novella, first published in 1864, is written from the point of view of an embittered 40-year-old former civil servant holed up in a St Petersburg basement railing against the world. "Intoxicated with spite" is how he describes his state of mind in this engrossing study of loneliness and the struggle to find a place in the world.

MICHELLE MAGORIAN
GOODNIGHT
MISTER
TOM

GOODNIGHT MISTER TOM
Michelle Magorian
(Puffin, £7.99)
When the Second World War breaks out Tom Oakley is a reclusive man in his 60s, keeping himself distant from his own rural community and reacting with hostility whenever fellow villagers approach. A young evacuee from London, William Beech, is foisted upon him, beginning a relationship between two vulnerable, lonely characters that makes this book an enduring children's classic.



DRACULA
Bram Stoker
(Penguin Classics, £4.99)
Lives in a remote castle that nobody goes near, only comes out at night, has lived this way for centuries, his only company some spooky women, a few bats and a self-assured young notary he's had to lure all the way from London for a bit of company? There is surely no greater loner in literary history than Count Dracula of Transylvania.

EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

a poem for europe

KONSTANDINOS MAHONEY, Greek–English–Irish London poet, won publication of his collection *Tutti Frutti* in the Sentinel Publication Poetry Book Competition, is the winner of the Poetry Society's 2017 Stanza Competition, and is recently published in *Butcher's Dog 12*, and *Live Canon Anthology 2019*. He teaches Creative Writing at Hong Kong University.

MISSING THE BONGS

Tonight, as we leave the Globe, the deep dark
Thames surges single-minded under the
Millennial Bridge, merciless if you fall in,
your ferry collides, it's in no mood to pose
for a photo, just wants to flow the hell back

out to sea away from this lunacy. Somewhere
across the water a terrorised bird is squealing,
the sound pigs make in an abattoir. It is the night
of leaving when those in favour would have us
celebrate, a Tyburn carnival, ale and pies as

bodies dangle. People pass, heads bowed against
the rain, voices snatched by the wind. A busker
in the tunnel tucks his violin tenderly into its
battered case, closes the lid - he's going home,
though he's no longer sure where that is.

Waterloo station, a hushed cathedral ready for a
requiem. A red-faced reveller fresh off a train,
wrapped in a nylon union flag, is on his way to
Parliament Square, and he has to be quick,
he doesn't want to miss the bongs.

A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor. Submit your poems to poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk

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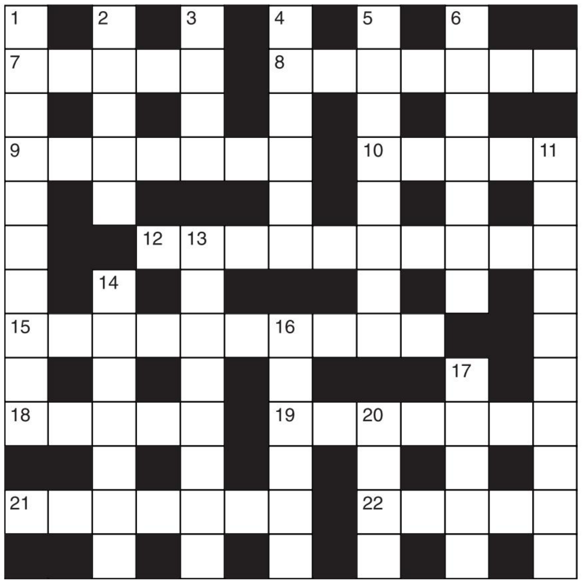
Cryptic 1

Across
7. A certain amount of time with one nymph of paradise (5)
8. Bring something to life and give it a name, maybe (7)
9. Communications pioneer of Romanic origin (7)
10. Thoroughly scour brushwood country (5)
12. Counterfeit one side of a coin to make progress! (5,5)
15. Telephone the chief organiser of the gang (10)
18. Make a record of western ceremony (5)
19. Communist vote will get the bird! (7)
21. One sailor – the skipper's righthand man needs many more (7)
22. Pitched from one end to the other, we hear (5)

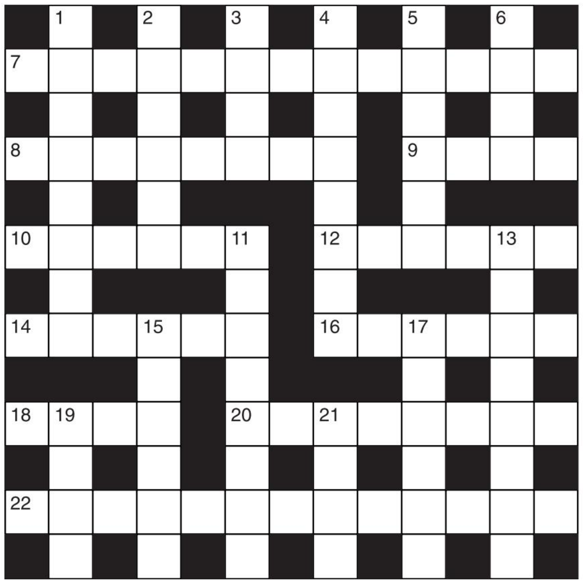
Down
1. Hitches a lift with sailors – it's torture! (5–5)
2. A number of sheets required for those who sing together, we hear (5)
3. After the end of April, I make a swimming pool (4)
4. In position for a confrontation (6)
5. Give the wrong form to emphasis (8)
6. Provided transport – motor ride changed (7)
11. Sleeping partners! (10)
13. They produce mineral resources in good condition in different soil (3,5)
14. Consecrates, when no stain can be found (7)
16. Introduce carbon dioxide back in wet areas! (6)
17. Flat piece of wood is drilled, by the sound of it (5)
20. Assignation in the orchard at eventide (4)



Cryptic 2

Across
7. It puts most of the world's drivers on the right side (4,2,3,4)
8. Being in favour of remedies obtains them (8)
9. Give father ring for decorative skirting (4)
10. Keep cheerful – wild animal has risen! (4,2)
12. Headgear for the mountaineer? (3,3)
14. A grim combination behind the ship (6)
16. They offer support for those who want to paint (6)
18. Metal is always out at the front (4)
20. Set aside too much control? (8)
22. Introduce dramatically? (5,4,4)

Down
1. Do they provide semi-demi pension? (8)
2. Does he foil the attempts of those who want to get in? (6)
3. In Australia farms are often seen from a distance (4)
4. Order punishment arising from this case (8)
5. The captain ought to know the game! (6)
6 Pull up where patients are (4)
11. Anteater long out of order and in pain (8)
13. Everything is plain when the danger has passed (3,5)
15. In conclusion, play the last part in G (6)
17 Predicament results from such capers (6)
19. Heather leaves learning to work for her living (4)
21. Has a meal in a cafe at Southampton (4)



Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1
Across: 7 Houri; 8 Animate; 9 Marconi; 10 Scrub; 12 Forge ahead; 15 Ringleader; 18 Write; 19 Redpoll; 21 Matelot; 22 Threw. **Down:** 1 Thumb-screw 2 Quire; 3 Lido; 4 Facing; 5 Misshape; 6 Carried; 11 Bedfellows; 13 Oil wells; 14 Anoints 16 Aerate; 17 Board; 20 Date.

Cryptic 2
Across: 7 Rule of the road; 8 Procures; 9 Dado; 10 Bear up; 12 Ice cap; 14 Astern; 16 Easels; 18 Lead; 20 Overrule; 22 Bring into play. **Down:** 1 Quarters; 2 Fencer; 3 Afar; 4 Chastise; 5 Bridge; 6 Ward; 11 Pangolin; 13 All clear; 15 Ending; 17 Scrape; 19 Earn; 21 Eats.

Sudoku solutions

Medium 1

2	9	3	1	4	5	8	7	6
8	6	1	9	7	3	2	4	5
7	4	5	2	6	8	1	3	9
6	1	4	5	3	7	9	8	2
5	7	2	8	9	4	3	6	1
3	8	9	6	1	2	7	5	4
9	3	7	4	2	6	5	1	8
1	5	6	7	8	9	4	2	3
4	2	8	3	5	1	6	9	7

Medium 2

2	1	9	3	8	7	5	4	6
8	5	3	9	4	6	1	7	2
6	7	4	1	5	2	8	3	9
5	6	8	4	1	3	9	2	7
9	2	7	8	6	5	4	1	3
4	3	1	7	2	9	6	5	8
3	9	5	6	7	1	2	8	4
7	8	2	5	9	4	3	6	1
1	4	6	2	3	8	7	9	5

Hard 1

6	7	2	3	8	5	1	4	9
3	9	5	2	1	4	7	8	6
4	1	8	9	7	6	3	5	2
8	5	6	7	3	1	9	2	4
9	4	3	5	6	2	8	7	1
1	2	7	4	9	8	5	6	3
2	3	9	8	4	7	6	1	5
5	8	1	6	2	3	4	9	7
7	6	4	1	5	9	2	3	8

Hard 2

3	6	2	9	1	4	5	8	7
4	7	9	8	5	3	2	1	6
5	8	1	6	2	7	3	9	4
8	3	5	4	9	6	7	2	1
2	1	4	3	7	5	9	6	8
6	9	7	1	8	2	4	5	3
1	2	3	5	4	8	6	7	9
9	5	6	7	3	1	8	4	2
7	4	8	2	6	9	1	3	5

Numberfit solutions

1

■	1	3	7	7	3	3	4	■
1	■	2	2	■	4	2	■	4
4	6	2	■	■	■	2	6	2
5	8	1	9	■	5	1	8	2
5	2	2	1	4	4	5	5	3
2	8	4	5	■	6	4	8	5
2	6	4	■	■	■	5	6	5
4	■	7	4	■	2	5	■	1
■	4	3	3	4	7	7	1	■

2

5	4	9	7	4	9	2	6	5
4	1	■	3	6	0	■	■	4
4	3	9	6	8	6	9	■	9
7	■	6	■	2	■	7	3	4
2	4	6	8	■	6	4	2	8
9	6	3	■	2	■	3	■	8
2	■	2	9	8	6	2	3	6
6	■	■	7	4	6	■	4	3
5	4	9	2	6	2	6	3	5

Sudoku – medium 1

2	9	3						
8			9			2	4	
7			2		8		3	
	1	4		3		9		
			8		4			
		9		1		7	5	
	3		4		6			8
	5	6			9			3
						6	9	7

Sudoku – medium 2

		9		8		5		
			9		6			
6		4		5		8		9
	6		4		3		2	
9		7				4		3
	3		7		9		5	
3		5		7		2		4
			5		4			
		6		3		7		

Sudoku – hard 1

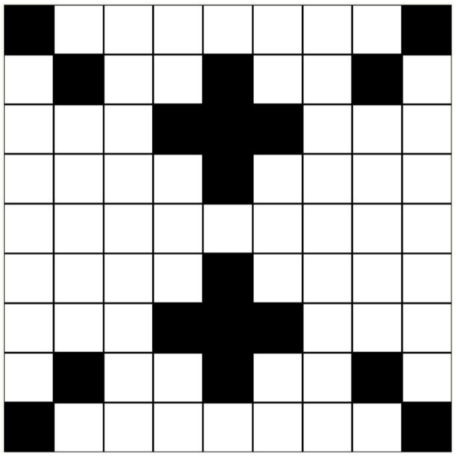
6		2			5			
			2		4		8	
4				7		3		
	5						2	4
		3				8		
1	2						6	
		9		4				5
	8		6		3			
			1			2		8

Sudoku – hard 2

3	6					5		
4				5	3		1	
				2				4
					6		2	
	1	4				9	6	
	9		1					
1				4				
	5		7	3				2
		8					3	5

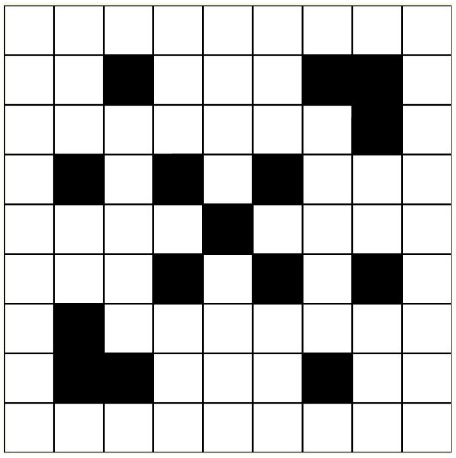
Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.



Numberfit 1

2 digits: 22 – 25 – 27 – 34 – 42 – 43 – 72 – 74
3 digits: 262 – 264 – 462 – 546 – 565 – 915
4 digits: 2845 – 5182 – 5819 – 6485
5 digits: 68286 – 68586
7 digits: 1377334 – 1455224 – 4223551 – 4334771
9 digits: 322124473 – 322154557 – 522144553



Numberfit 2

2 digits: 32 – 41 – 43 – 46
3 digits: 343 – 360 – 413 – 662 – 734 – 736 – 746 – 906 – 963 – 972
4 digits: 2468 – 2846 – 4682 – 6428
5 digits: 96632 – 97432
7 digits: 2986236 – 4396869
9 digits: 544729265 – 549262635 – 549488635 – 549749265

BETTER USE OF BEST PRACTICE

PETER TRUDGILL on a grammar 'rule' it is safe to ignore... and footballing convention that Jose Mourinho often ignores

KNOWS BEST: Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho Photo: Getty Images

After a football match it is often said by those talking about the event that "the best team won" – or in the case of a losing team managed by Jose Mourinho, that the best team did not win.

Everybody who speaks English as their native language knows exactly what the word *best* means. If someone is best at something, then there is nobody who is better than them. If you are able to run 100 metres in 13 seconds and your brother can only do it in 15 seconds, then you are the best at running 100 metres. If one football team has beaten another one, then the evidence points towards them being the best team – though it is perfectly true, of course, that one team can play more skilfully and attractively than another and still fail to win

There are some people, however, who believe that it is not correct to use the word *best* like this. They argue that if there are only two of you – you and your brother, for instance – then you are not the *best* but the *better* performer. *Best*, they argue, should be reserved for referring to one of three or more people or entities. So after a football match, they believe we should say that the *better* team won (or in the case of Mourinho, not).

This argument has absolutely no foundation in the grammar of the English language. There is no reason why English speakers should not say that something or somebody is the best or fastest or nicest of two. If you are the top, the leader, the superior one, then you are the best, regardless of how many are being evaluated.

Adjectives like *better* and *faster* are technically known as comparatives, while forms such as *best* and *fastest* are called superlatives. If a good athlete compares herself as a runner with everyone else in her family, she might be able to say that she is *faster* and *better* than all the other family members – and that she is therefore the *fastest* and the *best*. In the same way, if she compares herself just with her brother, then she would still be the *fastest* and the *best* – superlative – even if there are only two siblings who are being compared.

It is quite true that people of my age were taught at school that there is a rule which says that the phrase has to be "the better of two". But the reason we were taught this rule is that there is no such rule. The real rules of English grammar do not have to be taught to native speakers. By the time we are three and four years old – so before we arrive at school – we have acquired most of the genuine rules of English grammar already.

We all figured out the very important English-language rule that adjectives come before nouns, without any formal instruction. Nobody ever told us that it was wrong to say *a car black* – even very young children quite naturally say *a black car*. Speakers of other languages such as French, Welsh and Gaelic learn a different rule about the order of nouns and adjectives, once again without anybody telling them. Young speakers of these languages rather early on quite spontaneously say *voiture noire*, *car du*, *càr dubh* – literally "car black".

Similarly, English speakers know that it is entirely normal to say "if you have to choose between the red one and the blue one, then the blue one would be the best choice". But notice that there actually is a rule here: no one would say "the blue one would be a best choice". If the indefinite article *a* is used, then the comparative *better* occurs, not the superlative. But it's the use of *a* rather than *the* which determines which is used, not how many items are being compared. That's something else we all learnt without anybody telling us.

CLUMSY

Just as *drowsy* comes from *to drowse*, so *clumsy* seems to have come from the now vanished verb *to clumse*, which meant something like "to become stiff with cold". The adjective *clumsy*, with its modern meaning of "lacking in agility or dexterity", did not come into use in English until about 1600.

PASSIONATE EUROPHILE: Actor Bruno Ganz in Switzerland, 1967

Photo: Getty Images

GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

#135 BRUNO GANZ

MARCH 22, 1941 – FEBRUARY 16, 2019

Few people from any branch of the arts could claim to be as dyed-in-the-wool European as Bruno Ganz. Most of his 80 film roles were European productions and nearly all his theatrical appearances were in plays by European writers. He narrated German fairy tales as part of a recording of Johannes Brahms' song cycle *Die schöne Magelone* that the *Times* called "a marvel" and at the 2014 memorial concert for his great friend, the Italian conductor Claudio Abbado, read from Friedrich Hölderlin's poem *Brod und Wein*.

Everything Ganz did seemed to come from somewhere deep in the soul of the continent itself. From a televised role as Shalimov in Maxim Gorky's *Summerfolk* that propelled him to fame in Germany in 1976 to one of his final roles as a Serbian mob boss in the 2014 film *In Order of Disappearance*, Ganz covered almost the whole of Europe during an acting career spanning six decades.

If this abiding Europeanness had an epicentre it was unquestionably Berlin, where he lived for most of his adult life and which served as the location of the two film roles that defined his career.

Ganz will always be best known outside the German-speaking world for his performance as Adolf Hitler in *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*), the first time Hitler had been portrayed in a German film in half a century. With the war in its final days and the dictator forced to come to terms with impending defeat, Ganz delivered an unforgettable performance that swings between ranting tyrant and delusional 56-year-old with, in Ganz's interpretation, advanced Parkinson's disease.

Taking on the role was a brave decision; *Der Untergang* was always destined to be a controversial film. Some hailed the bravery of the production for even tackling the subject while many denounced what they saw as the "humanising" of evil.

"I felt like a sinner in a very strong Catholic way," says Ganz afterwards. "Sometimes I even felt I had done something I shouldn't have done. I felt dirty. I needed too much time to get rid of it – two years, in fact. Having played him I cannot claim to understand Hitler. He had no sense of pity, no compassion, no understanding of what the victims of war suffered. Ultimately, I could not get to the heart of Hitler because there was none."

Ganz undertook many months of research, including listening closely to a short recording made secretly in 1942 when Hitler was talking to a Finnish diplomat.

"It was Hitler's natural voice," he said, "not the screaming orator we are used to but a soft, attractive voice, a calm baritone. I tried to capture that. I could also hear very clearly that he came from Austria, that he was not German."

Of all the commentary and analysis that followed the film's release what stayed with Ganz most was a pair of letters he received from an elderly German doctor, the first of which arrived when news emerged of his casting.

"He wrote me a letter saying, 'Don't fall into the trap of chewing the scenery. I got close to that man and that's not him'," recalled Ganz. "He saw the film and he wrote me a second letter saying I had come very close indeed to the real person."

Ganz's simmering, sickly Hitler prowled the bunker to which he had withdrawn in the final weeks of the war as Allied forces pounded Berlin and closed in on final victory. Lights flickered in the subterranean lair as the distant thump of explosions grew ever closer. In his other great film role, however, Ganz soared over the city.

As the angel Damiel in Wim Wenders' 1987 *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*) he played a witness to the individual sufferings of pre-unification Berliners. Damiel was one of a pair of angels who had watched over the city since its foundation, attending to its inhabitants, listening to their innermost dreams, hopes, fears, loves and sufferings, unable to interfere, invisible until the final moments, just bearing witness. Eventually Damiel falls in love with Marion, a struggling trapeze artist living in a caravan in West Berlin for whom he elects to renounce his immortality and become human. Ganz's performance remains one of the most defining of any city in the history of film.

Yet for a man who came to be a celluloid representative of a city, even a country, it often comes as a surprise to people outside the German-speaking world that Bruno Ganz wasn't German. Indeed, his nationality was something he credited as contributing positively to his performance as Hitler in *Der Untergang*.

"Fortunately, being Swiss, I do not have the kind of problems many of my German friends have, questioning their parents or grandparents about what they did in that time," he said. "Instead, I could place my Swiss passport between Hitler and my heart."

The Zurich-born son of a Swiss mechanic and an Italian mother, Ganz studied drama against his parents' wishes but didn't graduate.

"I felt I had something to express personally but the problem was how to overcome my natural shyness," he said. "I was fascinated by acting but my social background primed me to think I couldn't do it. I always felt that actors came from a higher class and I would never be admitted into that circle."

He worked in a Zurich bookshop before, at the dawn of the 1960s, overcoming his reticence, moving to Germany and pursuing a career on the stage. He was an instant success, playing Hamlet for the first time at the age of just 24 in 1965. Five years later, having settled in Berlin, he co-founded Schaubühne, an independent left-wing independent theatre company set up in the spirit of the 1968 student uprisings whose productions of Brecht and Ibsen in particular were so highly regarded they were frequently televised. It was Ganz's on-screen performance in a Schaubühne staging of Gorky's *Summerfolk* in 1976 that truly brought him to public attention.

A year later he appeared in the film that established him as a screen actor. In his first collaboration with Wim Wenders, *The American Friend*, adapted from a Patricia Highsmith novel, Ganz played a picture framer persuaded by Dennis Hopper's Tom Ripley to become an assassin in the mistaken belief that he is dying.

Yet for all his success in such English language films – he was also in *The Reader* opposite Kate Winslet and the remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* – Ganz always resisted the pull of transatlantic glamour (even at the peak of his fame he drove the same battered old Volkswagen). He received a slew of Hollywood offers after *Der Himmel über Berlin* in particular but rejected them all.

"I didn't like the scripts I was sent because from the first page you knew everything," he said, even turning down an approach from Steven Spielberg to play Oskar Schindler in *Schindler's List*.

A passionate Europhile, when portraying a Frenchman in the 1992 Australian production *The Last Days of Chez Nous* Ganz refused to wear a beret on the grounds that, "it's close to being insulting that the whole knowledge of the French nation is found in the beret. There is more to France than just a hat".

For all his international praise and a slew of awards from around the world, the accolade that meant the most to Ganz was when in 1996 he became custodian of the prestigious Iffland Ring, an item of jewellery that's said to have originated with Goethe who presented it to the actor August Wilhelm Iffland in recognition of his work. Since then on the death of its holder the ring has passed on to the person they considered to be the most worthy actor performing in German. Ganz inherited the ring on the death of its previous owner Josef Meinrad.

One of the great German language actors and a man who played both an angel and the human embodiment of evil, Ganz often recalled the moment he realised he'd conquered his shyness and accepted that his destiny lay as a performer. Appropriately he was right at the heart of Europe.

"One evening when I was a youth in Switzerland I lay on top of a haystack, looking up into the starry sky and something changed in me," he recalled. "It was an experience that made me so happy I thought, now, right here, the whole world should be able to see me. I think that was the spark, the moment that turned me into an actor."

WILL SELF

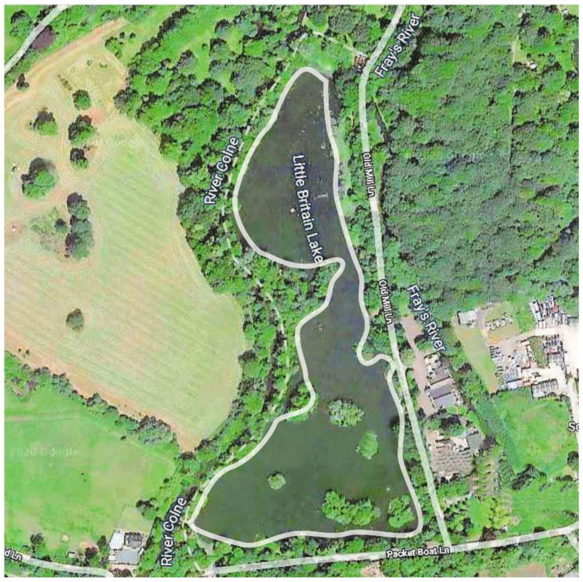
Multicultural Man ..
on Little Britain Lake

During our last session I took my students for a walk around Little Britain Lake, which lies in a confusion of confluences between Fray's River, the River Colne and the Grand Union Canal, about a mile to the west of the campus. The lake and its environs have an important role in recent British environmentalism, being the site of the naturalist Richard Mabey's first foray into what he dubbed "the unofficial countryside": those edgelands, between the urban and the rural that evince greater biodiversity than the monocultures of the official countryside. Mabey's eponymous book became a sort of missal for those who like to wander these strange landscapes in the hinterland of our cities, where all the industries of urbanity's auto-cannibalism – gravel pits, brick fields, landfills, car breakers and totters' yards – reside.

Despite having taught nearby for almost a decade, and taking students out on many walks in the university's environs, I'd never actually been to the lake before – which is bizarre for a self-proclaimed "psychogeographer", who's preoccupied by the affects of place and space. I suspect it's the very name of the place that put me off: surely, it would be impossible to view it as anything but either a synecdoche or a microcosm of Big Britain – and while I, too, enjoyed Matt Lucas and David Walliams' comedy sketch show of the same name, in our current parlous position that joke isn't funny anymore.

Crossing a hump-backed bridge that spans the canal, on an impulse we dropped down off the road, clambered over a sagging barbed-wire fence and into an uncultivated field full of brambles. The desiccated stems of last year's cow parsley crackled underfoot, the contrails of planes approaching Heathrow scratched at the baby-blue empyrean, and in the mid-distance the razor wire garnishing the fences of a lorry park coruscated with the winter sun's rays. I talked to the students a bit about the right to roam, the distinction between common and criminal trespass, and how they should never be intimidated by bellicose propertarians bellowing at them to "Get off of my land!" I was trying to stay focused on the idea of the unofficial countryside – but as we gained the far corner of the field and realised the head-high gate out on to the lane was chained shut, I couldn't help thinking about points-based immigration systems, and the folly of trying to prevent incomers entering at one port, while the coastline remains wide open.

Having backtracked, we headed down Old Mill Lane, passing a substantial Tudorbethan style detached house that was still under construction. Once more we halted, so I could ram home my oft-repeated message: that this perennial vernacular architecture represents the real core of the English national character, which is fervent uchronicism: the belief in a time-that-never was – Merrie England, when knights were bold, ladies compliant, and peasants happy in the muck of their organic social hierarchy. Then we went on – and found ourselves on the shores of the lake, beside comprehensive signage warning us not to swim, to operate drones, or – should we be licensed to "fish" – to carry off our catch. This latter injunction was illustrated by a stick-figure sprinting with a ludicrously outsize stick-fish in his arms.



Was this, I wondered (although not aloud), some wishful graphic thinking, indicating, perhaps, an underlying conviction that once freed from the punitive quotas of the European Union, our trawlers will again bring home a watery bounty? Probably not. Rather, the signage, the small parking area, the benches and balustrades, the bins and the small jetties for people to sit on while they pretended to be doing something, indicated that Mabey's unofficial countryside had now been gazetted: incorporated into that wider territory known as "Great Britain". I didn't note whether there were any CCTV cameras focused on the sylvan scene – but if not, there ought to have been, for nothing more typifies this renascent national identity of ours that its infantile narcissism: we have more of this surveillance than any other country in the world, and why on earth would we want to preserve so many images of our shopping centres and our car parks if not because we're convinced of their singular beauty.

In truth, Little Britain Lake was rather beautiful on a sunny February morning, with a noble heron arching its neck in a great and twiggy nest that sat atop the withies exploding from a semi-submerged willow. As to why this flooded gravel pit is so-called, it is as I feared due to a certain congruence between it and its greater namesake; namely, they're both the same shape. It's a trivial and arbitrary reason for a designation – I'm sure you'll agree, although not quite as trivial as the reasoning of those who persist in the delusion that the "great" in Britain refers to an absolute and numinous quality, rather than a highly relative and phenomenal one.

THE NEW EUROPEAN PODCAST

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